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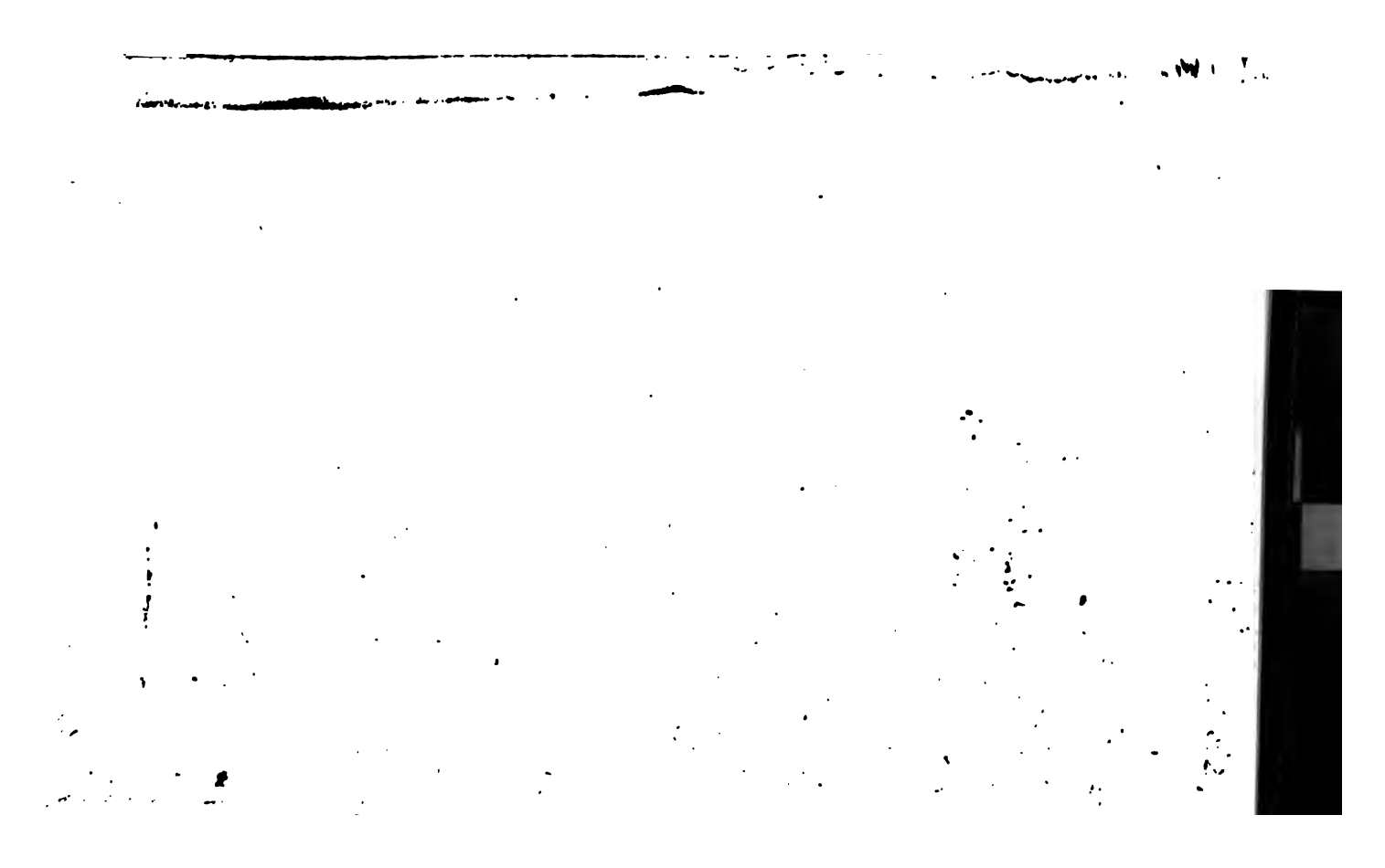

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PREFATORY NOTE.

It ought to be stated that the account of the play *Elvira*, given in Chapter VII. of the present story, is based upon an existing play, the work of a little known writer of the Romantic time, whose short, brilliant life came to a tragical end in 1836.

M. A. W.

CHAPTER I.

It was the day of the private view at the Royal Academy. The great courtyard of Burlington House was full of carriages, and a continuous stream of guests was pressing up the red-carpeted stairs, over which presided some of the most imposing individuals known to the eyes of Londoners, second only to Her Majesty's beefeaters in glory of scarlet apparel. Inside, however, as it was not yet luncheon-time, the rooms were but moderately filled. It was possible to see the pictures, to appreciate the spring dresses, and to single out a friend even across the Long Gallery. The usual people were there: Academicians of the old school and Academicians of the new; R.A.'s coming from Kensington and the 'regions of culture,' and R.A.'s coming from more northerly and provincial neighbourhoods where art lives a little desolately and barely, in

want of the graces and adornings with which 'culture' professes to provide her. There were politicians still capable—as it was only the first week of May—of throwing some zest into their amusements. There were art-critics who, accustomed as they were by profession to take their art in large and rapid draughts, had yet been unable to content themselves with the one meagre day allowed by the Academy for the examination of some 800 works, and were now eking out their notes of the day before by a few supplementary jottings taken in the intervals of conversation with their lady friends. There were the great dealers betraying in look and gait their profound, yet modest, consciousness that upon them rested the foundations of the artistic order, and that if, in a superficial conception of things, the star of an Academician differs from that of the man who buys his pictures in glory, the truly philosophic mind assesses matters differently. And, most important of all, there were the women, old and young, some in the full freshness of spring cottons, as if the east wind outside were not mocking the

efforts of the May sun, and others still wrapped in furs, which showed a juster sense of the caprices of the English climate. Among them one might distinguish the usual shades and species: the familiar country cousin, gathering material for the over-awing of such of her neighbours as were unable to dip themselves every year in the stream of London; the women folk of the artist world, presenting greater varieties of type than the women of any other class can boast; and lastly, a sprinkling of the women of what calls itself 'London Society,' as well dressed, as well mannered, and as well provided with acquaintance as is the custom of their kind.

In one of the farther rooms, more scantily peopled as yet than the rest, a tall thin man was strolling listlessly from picture to picture, making every now and then hasty references to his catalogue, but in general eyeing all he saw with the look of one in whom familiarity with the sight before him had bred weariness, if not contempt. He was a handsome man, with a broad brow and a pleasant gentleness of expression. The eyes were fine and thoughtful, and there was a com-

bination of intellectual force with great delicacy of line in the contour of the head and face which was particularly attractive, especially to women of the more cultivated and impressionable sort. His thin grayish hair was rather long—not of that pronounced length which inevitably challenges the decision of the bystander as to whether the wearer be fool or poet, but still long enough to fall a little carelessly round the head and so take off from the spruce conventional effect of the owner's irreproachable dress and general London air.

Mr. Eustace Kendal—to give the person we have been describing his name—was not apparently in a good temper with his surroundings. He was standing with a dissatisfied expression before a Venetian scene drawn by a brilliant member of a group of English artists settled on foreign soil and trained in foreign methods.

'Not so good as last year,' he was remarking to himself. 'Vulgar drawing, vulgar composition, hasty work everywhere. It is success spoils all these men—success and the amount of money there is going. The man who painted this didn't

get any pleasure out of it. But it's the same all round. It is money and luxury and the struggle to live which are driving us all on and killing the artist's natural joy in his work. And presently, as that odd little Frenchman said to me last year, we shall have dropped irretrievably into the "lowest depth of mediocrity."'

'Kendal!' said an eager voice close to his ear, while a hand was laid on his arm, 'do you know that girl?'

Kendal turned in astonishment and saw a short oldish man, in whom he recognised a famous artist, standing by, his keen mobile face wearing an expression of strong interest and inquiry.

'What girl?' he asked, with a smile, shaking his questioner by the hand.

'That girl in black, standing by Orchardson's picture. Why, you must know her by sight! It's Miss Bretherton, the actress. Did you ever see such beauty? I must get somebody to introduce me to her. There's nothing worth looking at since she came in. But, by ill luck, nobody here seems to know her.'

Eustace Kendal, to whom the warm artist's

temperament of his friend was well known, turned with some amusement towards the picture named, and noticed that flutter in the room which shows that something or some one of interest is present. People trying to look unconcerned, and catalogue in hand, were edging towards the spot where the lady in black stood, glancing alternately at her and at the pictures, in the manner of those equally determined to satisfy their curiosity and their sense of politeness. The lady in question, meanwhile, conscious that she was being looked at, but not apparently disturbed by it, was talking to another lady, the only person with her, a tall, gaunt woman, also dressed in black and gifted abundantly with the forbidding aspect which beauty requires in its duenna.

Kendal could see nothing more at first than a tall, slender figure, a beautiful head, and a delicate white profile, in flashing contrast with its black surroundings, and with lines of golden brown hair. But in profile and figure there was an extraordinary distinction and grace which reconciled him to his friend's eagerness and made him wish for the beauty's next movement. Presently

she turned and caught the gaze of the two men full upon her. Her eyes dropped a little, but there was nothing ill-bred or excessive in her self-consciousness. She took her companion's arm with a quiet movement, and drew her towards one of the striking pictures of the year, some little way off. The two men also turned and walked away.

'I never saw such beauty as that before,' said the artist, with emphasis. 'I must find some one who knows her, and get the chance of seeing that face light up, else I shall go home—one may as well. These daubs are not worth the trouble of considering now!'

'See what it is to be an "ideal painter,"' said Kendal, laughing. 'At home one paints river goddesses, and tree-nymphs, and such like remote creatures, and abroad one falls a victim to the first well-dressed, healthy-looking girl—chaperone, bonnet, and all.'

'Show me another like her,' said his friend warmly. 'I tell you they're not to be met with like that every day. *Je me connais en beauté*, my dear fellow, and I never saw such perfection, both

of line and colour, as that. It is extraordinary; it excites one as an artist. Look, is that Wallace now going up to her?'

Kendal turned and saw a short fair man, with a dry keen American face, walk up to the beauty and speak to her. She greeted him cordially, with a beaming smile and bright emphatic movements of the head, and the three strolled on.

'Yes, that is Edward Wallace,—very much in it, apparently. That is the way Americans have. They always know everybody it's desirable to know. But now's your chance, Forbes. Stroll carelessly past them, catch Wallace's eye, and the thing is done.'

Mr. Forbes had already dropped Kendal's arm, and was sauntering across the room towards the chatting trio. Kendal watched the scene from a distance with some amusement; saw his friend brush carelessly past the American, look back, smile, stop, and hold out his hand; evidently a whisper passed between them, for the next moment Mr. Forbes was making a low bow to the beauty, and immediately afterwards Kendal saw his fine gray head and stooping shoulders

disappear into the next room, side by side with Miss Bretherton's erect and graceful figure.

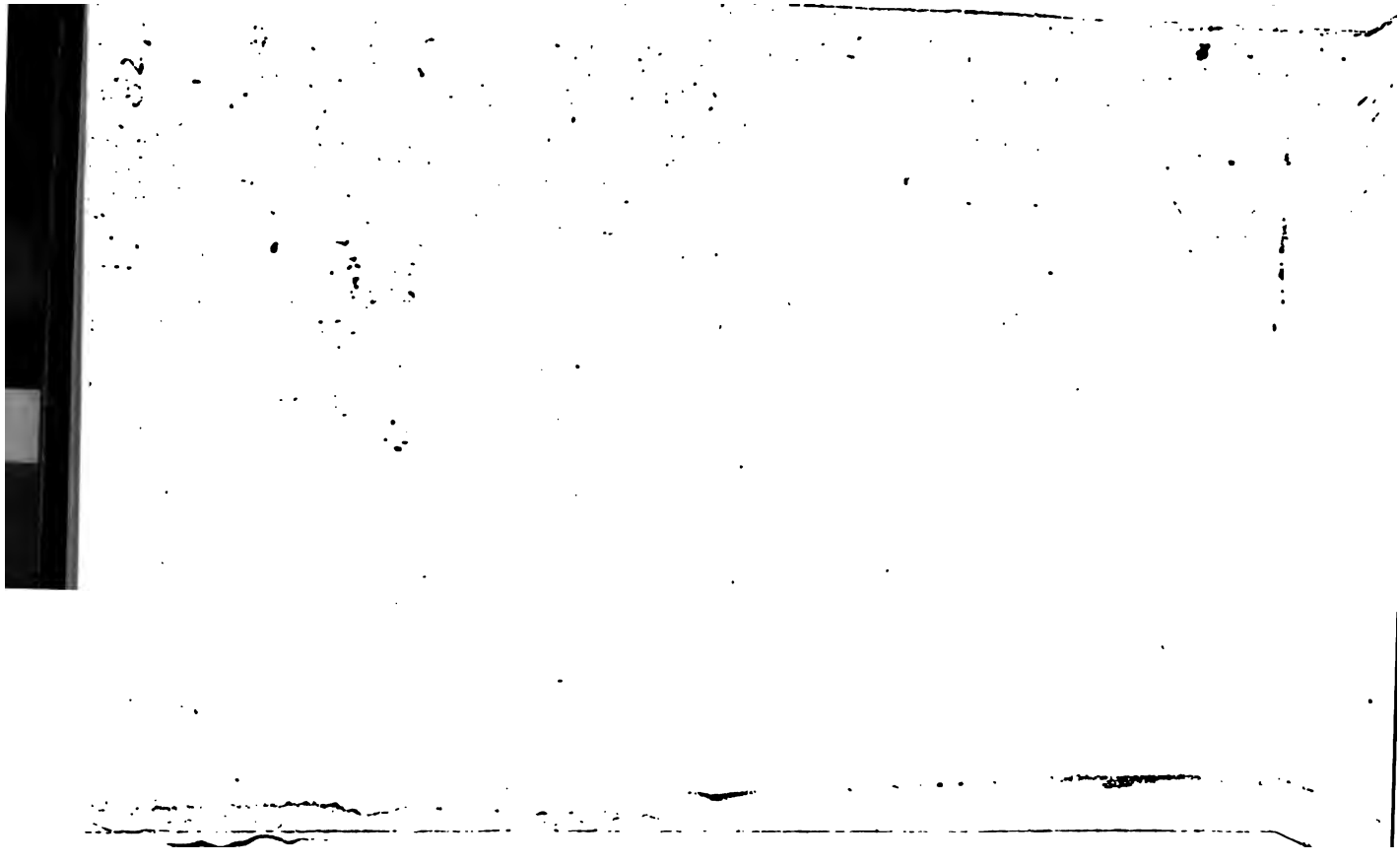
Kendal betook himself once more to the pictures, and, presently finding some acquaintances, made a rapid tour of the rooms with them, parting with them at the entrance that he might himself go back and look at two or three things in the sculpture room which he had been told were important and promising. There he came across the American, Edward Wallace, who at once took him by the arm with the manner of an old friend and a little burst of laughter.

'So you saw the introduction? What a man is Forbes! He is as young still as he was at eighteen. I envy him. He took Miss Bretherton right round, talked to her of all his favourite hobbies, looked at her in a way which would have been awkward if it had been anybody else but such a gentlemanly maniac as Forbes, and has almost made her promise to sit to him. Miss Bretherton was a little bewildered, I think. She is so new to London that she doesn't know who's who yet in the least. I had to take her aside and explain to her Forbes's honours; then

she fired up—there is a naïve hero-worship about her just now that she is fresh from a colony—and made herself as pleasant to him as a girl could be. I prophesy Forbes will think of nothing else for the season.'

'Well, she's a brilliant creature,' said Kendal. 'It's extraordinary how she shone out beside the pretty English girls about her. It is an intoxicating possession for a woman, such beauty as that; it's like royalty; it places the individual under conditions quite unlike those of common mortals. I suppose it's that rather than any real ability as an actress that has made her a success? I noticed the papers said as much—some more politely than others.'

'Oh, she's not much of an actress; she has no training, no *finesse*. But you'll see, she'll be the great success of the season. She has wonderful grace on the stage, and a fine voice in spite of tricks. And then her *Wesen* is so attractive; she is such a frank, unspoilt, good-hearted creature. Her audience falls in love with her, and that goes a long way. But I wish she had had a trifle more education and something worth call-



see much of her. But I have taken her and her people out, two or three times, sight-seeing, since they came — Westminster Abbey, the National Gallery, and so forth. She is very keen about everything, and the Worralls — her uncle and aunt — stick to her pretty closely.'

'Where does she come from?'

'Well, her father was the Scotch overseer of a sugar plantation not far from Kingston, and he married an Italian, one of your fair Venetian type — a strange race-combination; I suppose it's the secret of the brilliancy and out-of-the-wayness of the girl's beauty. Her mother died when she was small, and the child grew up alone. Her father, however, seems to have been a good sort of man, and to have looked after her. Presently she drew the attention of an uncle, a shopkeeper in Kingston, and a shrewd, hard, money-making fellow, who saw there was something to be made out of her. She had already shown a turn for reciting, and had performed at various places — in the schoolroom belonging to the estate, and so on. The father didn't encourage her fancy for it, naturally, being Scotch and Presbyterian. How-

ever, he died of fever, and then the child at sixteen fell into her uncle's charge. He seems to have seen at once exactly what line to take. To put it cynically, I imagine he argued something like this: "Beauty extraordinary—character everything that could be desired—talent not much. So that the things to stake on are the beauty and the character, and let the talent take care of itself." Anyhow, he got her on to the Kingston theatre—a poor little place enough—and he and the aunt, that sour-looking creature you saw with her, looked after her like dragons. Naturally, she was soon the talk of Kingston: what with her looks and her grace and the difficulty of coming near her, the whole European society, the garrison, Government House, and all, were at her feet. Then the uncle played his cards for a European engagement. You remember that Governor Rutherford they had a little time ago? the writer of that little set of drawing-room plays—*Nineteenth Century Interludes*, I think he called them? It was his last year, and he started for home while Isabel Bretherton was acting at Kingston. He came home full of her,

and, knowing all the theatrical people here, he was able to place her at once. Robinson decided to speculate in her, telegraphed out for her, and here she is, uncle, aunt, and invalid sister into the bargain.'

'Oh, she has a sister?'

'Yes; a little, white, crippled thing, peevish—cripples generally are—but full of a curious force of some hidden kind. Isabel is very good to her, and rather afraid of her. It seems to me that she is afraid of all her belongings. I believe they put upon her, and she has as much capacity as anybody I ever knew for letting herself be trampled upon.'

'What, that splendid, vivacious creature!' said Kendal incredulously. 'I think I'd back her for holding her own.'

'Ah, well, you see,' said the American, with the quiet superiority of a three weeks' acquaintance, 'I know something of her by now, and she's not quite what you might think her at first sight. However, whether she is afraid of them or not, it's to be hoped they will take care of her. Naturally, she has a splendid physique, but it

seems to me that London tries her. The piece they have chosen for her is a heavy one, and then of course society is down upon her, and in a few weeks she'll be the rage.'

'I haven't seen her at all,' said Kendal, beginning perhaps to be a little bored with the subject of Miss Bretherton, and turning, eye-glass in hand, towards the sculpture. 'Come and take me some evening.'

'By all means. But you must come and meet the girl herself at my sister's next Friday. She will be there at afternoon tea. I told Agnes I should ask anybody I liked. I warned her—you know her little weaknesses!—that she had better be first in the field: a month hence, it will be impossible to get hold of Miss Bretherton at all.'

'Then I'll certainly come, and do my worshipping before the crowd collects,' said Kendal, adding, as he half-curiously shifted his eye-glass so as to take in Wallace's bronzed, alert countenance, 'How did you happen to know her?'

'Rutherford introduced me. He's an old friend of mine.'

'Well,' said Kendal, moving off, 'Friday, then.

I shall be very glad to see Mrs. Stuart; it's ages since I saw her last.'

The American nodded cordially to him, and walked away. He was one of those pleasant, ubiquitous people who know every one and find time for everything—a well-known journalist, something of an artist, and still more of a man of the world, who went through his London season with some outward grumbling, but with a real inward zest such as few popular diners-out are blessed with. That he should have attached himself to the latest star was natural enough. He was the most discreet and profitable of cicerones, with a real talent for making himself useful to nice people. His friendship for Miss Bretherton gave her a certain stamp in Kendal's eyes, for Wallace had a fastidious taste in personalities and seldom made a mistake.

Kendal himself walked home, busy with very different thoughts, and was soon established at his writing-table in his high chambers overlooking an inner court of the Temple. It was a bright afternoon; the spring sunshine on the red roofs opposite was clear and gay; the old chim-

ney-stacks, towering into the pale blue sky, threw sharp shadows on the rich red and orange surface of the tiles. Below, the court was half in shadow, and utterly quiet and deserted. To the left there was a gleam of green, atoning for its spring thinness and scantiness by a vivid energy of colour; while straight across the court, beyond the rich patchwork of the roofs and the picturesque outlines of the chimneys, a delicate piece of white stone-work rose into air—the spire of one of Wren's churches, as dainty, as perfect, and as fastidiously balanced as the hand of man could leave it.

Inside, the room was such as fitted a studious bachelor of means. The book-cases on the walls held old college classics and law-books underneath, and above a miscellaneous literary library, of which the main bulk was French, while the side-wings, so to speak, had that tempting miscellaneous air—here a patch of German, there an island of Italian; on this side rows of English poets, on the other an abundance of novels of all languages—which delights the fond heart of the book-lover. The pictures were mostly autotypes

and photographs from subjects of Italian art, except in one corner, where a fine little collection of French historical engravings completely covered the wall, and drew a visitor's attention by the brilliancy of their black and white. On the writing-table were piles of paper-covered French books, representing for the most part the palmy days of the Romantics, though every here and there were intervening strata of naturalism, balanced in their turn by recurrent volumes of Sainte-Beuve. The whole had a studious air. The books were evidently collected with a purpose, and the piles of orderly MSS. lying on the writing-table seemed to sum up and explain their surroundings.

The only personal ornament of the room was a group of photographs on the mantelpiece. Two were faded and brown, and represented Kendal's parents, both of whom had been dead some years. The other was a large cabinet photograph of a woman no longer very young—a striking-looking woman, with a fine worn face and a general air of distinction and character. There was a strong resemblance between her features and those of

Eustace Kendal, and she was indeed his elder and only sister, the wife of a French senator, and her brother's chief friend and counsellor. Madame de Châteauvieux was a very noticeable person, and her influence over Eustace had been strong ever since their childish days. She was a woman who would have justified a repetition in the present day of Sismondi's enthusiastic estimate of the women of the First Empire. She had that *mélange du meilleur ton*, 'with the purest elegance of manner, and a store of varied information, with vivacity of impression and delicacy of feeling, which,' as he declared to Madame d'Albany, 'belongs only to your sex, and is found in its perfection only in the best society of France.'

In the days when she and Eustace had been the only children of a distinguished and wealthy father, a politician of some fame, and son-in-law to the Tory premier of his young days, she had always led and influenced her brother. He followed her admiringly through her London seasons, watching the impression she made, triumphing in her triumphs, and at home dis-

cussing every new book with her and sharing, at least in his college vacations, the secretary's work for their father, which she did excellently, and with a quick, keen, political sense which Eustace had never seen in any other woman. She was handsome in her own refined and delicate way, especially at night, when the sparkle of her white neck and arms and the added brightness of her dress gave her the accent and colour she was somewhat lacking in at other times. Naturally, she was in no want of suitors, for she was rich and her father was influential, but she said 'No' many times, and was nearly thirty before M. de Châteauvieux, the first secretary of the French Embassy, persuaded her to marry him. Since then she had filled an effective place in Parisian society. Her husband had abandoned diplomacy for politics, in which his general tendencies were Orleanist, while in literature he was well known as a constant contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. He and his wife maintained an interesting, and in its way influential, *salon*, which provided a meeting ground for the best English and French society,

and showed off at once the delicate quality of Madame de Châteauvieux's intelligence and the force and kindliness of her womanly tact.

Shortly after her marriage the father and mother died, within eighteen months of each other, and Eustace found his lot in life radically changed. He had been his father's secretary after leaving college, which prevented his making any serious efforts to succeed at the bar, and in consequence his interests, both of head and heart, had been more concentrated than is often the case with a young man within the walls of his home. He had admired his father sincerely, and the worth of his mother's loquacious and sometimes meddlesome tenderness he never realised fully till he had lost it. When he was finally alone, it became necessary for him to choose a line in life. His sister and he divided his father's money between them, and Eustace found himself with a fortune such as in the eyes of most of his friends constituted a leading of Providence towards two things—marriage and a seat in Parliament. However, fortunately, his sister, the only person to whom he applied for advice, was

in no hurry to press a decision in either case upon him. She saw that without the stimulus of the father's presence, Eustace's interest in politics was less real than his interest in letters, nor did the times seem to her propitious to that philosophic conservatism which might be said to represent the family type of mind. So she stirred him up to return to some of the projects of his Cambridge days when he and she were first bitten with a passion for that great, that fascinating French literature which absorbs, generation after generation, the interests of two-thirds of those who are sensitive to the things of letters. She suggested a book to him which took his fancy, and in planning it something of the old zest of life returned to him. Moreover, it was a book which required him to spend a part of every year in Paris, and the neighbourhood of his sister was now more delightful to him than ever.

So, after a time, he settled down contentedly in his London chambers with his books about him, and presently found that glow of labour stealing over him which is at once the stimulus and the

reward of every true son of knowledge. His book reconciled him to life again, and soon he was as often seen in the common haunts of London society as before. He dined out, he went to the theatre, he frequented his club like other men, and every year he spent three of the winter months in Paris, living in the best French world, talking as he never talked in London, and cultivating, whether in the theatre or in the *salons* of his sister's friends or in the studios of some of the more eminent of French artists, a fastidious critical temper, which was rapidly becoming more and more exacting, more and more master of the man.

Now, on this May afternoon, as he settled himself down to his work, it would have given any of those who liked Eustace Kendal—and they were many—pleasure to see how the look of fatigue with which he had returned from his round of the Academy faded away, how he shook back the tumbling gray locks from his eyes with the zest and the eagerness of one setting forth to battle, and how, as time passed on and the shadows deepened on the white spire opposite,

the contentment of successful labour showed itself in the slow unconscious caress which fell upon the back of the sleeping cat curled up in the chair beside him, or in the absent but still kindly smile with which he greeted the punctual entrance of the servant, who at five o'clock came to put tea and the evening paper beside him and to make up the fire, which crackled on with cheery companionable sounds through the lamp-lit evening and far into the night.

CHAPTER II.

Two or three days afterwards, Kendal, in looking over his engagement-book, in which the entries were methodically kept, noticed 'Afternoon tea, Mrs. Stuart's, Friday,' and at once sent off a note to Edward Wallace, suggesting that they should go to the theatre together on Thursday evening to see Miss Bretherton, 'for, as you will see,' he wrote, 'it will be impossible for me to meet her with a good conscience unless I have done my duty beforehand by going to see her perform.' To this the American replied by a counter proposal. 'Miss Bretherton,' he wrote, 'offers my sister and myself a box for Friday night; it will hold four or five; you must certainly be of the party, and I shall ask Forbes.'

Kendal felt himself a little entrapped, and would have preferred to see the actress under

conditions more favourable to an independent judgment, but he was conscious that a refusal would be ungracious, so he accepted, and prepared himself to meet the beauty in as sympathetic a frame of mind as possible.

On Friday afternoon, after a long and fruitful day's work, he found himself driving westward towards the old-fashioned Kensington house of which Mrs. Stuart, with her bright, bird-like, American ways, had succeeded in making a considerable social centre. His mind was still full of his work, phrases of Joubert or of Stendhal seemed to be still floating about him, and certain subtleties of artistic and critical speculation were still vaguely arguing themselves out within him as he sped westward, drawing in the pleasant influences of the spring sunshine, and delighting his eyes in the May green which was triumphing more and more every day over the grayness of London, and would soon have reached that lovely short-lived pause of victory which is all that summer can hope to win amid the dust and crowd of a great city.

Kendal was in that condition which is proper to men possessed of the true literary temperament, when the first fervour of youth for mere living is gone, when the first crude difficulties of accumulation are over, and when the mind, admitted to regions of an ampler æther and diviner air than any she has inhabited before, feels the full charm and spell of man's vast birthright of knowledge, and is seized with subtler curiosities and further-reaching desires than anything she has yet been conscious of. The world of fact and of idea is open, and the explorer's instruments are as perfect as they can be made. The intoxication of entrance is full upon him, and the lassitude which is the inevitable Nemesis of an unending task, and the chill which sooner or later descends upon every human hope, are as yet mere names and shadows, counting for nothing in the tranquil vista of his life, which seems to lie spread out before him. It is a rare state, for not many men are capable of the apprenticeship which leads to it, and a breath of hostile circumstance may put an end to it; but in its own manner and degree, and while it lasts,

it is one of the golden states of consciousness, and a man enjoying it feels this mysterious gift of existence to have been a kindly boon from some beneficent power.

Arrived at Mrs. Stuart's, Kendal found a large gathering already filling the pleasant low rooms looking out upon trees at either end, upon which Mrs. Stuart had impressed throughout the stamp of her own keen little personality. She was competent in all things—competent in her criticism of a book, and more than competent in all that pertained to the niceties of house management. Her dinner-parties, of which each was built up from foundation to climax with the most delicate skill and unity of plan; her pretty dresses, in which she trailed about her soft-coloured rooms; her energy, her kindliness, and even the evident but quite innocent pursuit of social perfection in which she delighted—all made her popular; and it was not difficult for her to gather together whom she would when she wished to launch a social novelty. On the present occasion she was very much in her element. All around her were people more or less

distinguished in the London world; here was an editor, there an artist; a junior member of the Government chatted over his tea with a foreign Minister, and a flow of the usual London chatter of a superior kind was rippling through the room when Kendal entered.

Mrs. Stuart put him in the way of a chair and of abundant chances of conversation, and then left him with a shrug of her shoulders and a whisper, 'The beauty is shockingly late! Tell me what I shall do if all these people are disappointed.' In reality Mrs. Stuart was beginning to be restless. Kendal had himself arrived very late, and, as the talk flowed faster, and the room filled fuller of guests eager for the new sensation which had been promised them, the spirits of the little hostess began to sink. The Minister had surreptitiously looked at his watch, and a tiresome lady friend had said good-bye in a voice which might have been lower, and with a lament which might have been spared. Mrs. Stuart set great store upon the success of her social undertakings, and to gather a crowd of people to meet the rising star of the season, and

then to have to send them home with only tea and talk to remember, was one of those failures which no one with any self-respect should allow themselves to risk.

However, fortune was once more kind to one of her chief favourites. Mrs. Stuart was just listening with a tired face to the well-meant, but depressing condolences of the barrister standing by her, who was describing to her the 'absurd failure' of a party to meet the leading actress of the *Comédie Française*, to which he had been invited in the previous season, when the sound of wheels was heard outside. Mrs. Stuart made a quick step forward, leaving her Job's comforter planted in the middle of his story; the hum of talk dropped in an instant, and the crowd about the door fell hastily back as it was thrown open and Miss Bretherton entered.

What a glow and radiance of beauty entered the room with her! She came in rapidly, her graceful head thrown eagerly back, her face kindling and her hands outstretched as she caught sight of Mrs. Stuart. There was a vigour and splendour of life about her that made all her

movements large and emphatic, and yet, at the same time, nothing could exceed the delicate finish of the physical structure itself. What was indeed characteristic in her was this combination of extraordinary perfectness of detail, with a flash, a warmth, a force of impression, such as often raises the lower kinds of beauty into excellence and picturesqueness, but is seldom found in connection with those types where the beauty is, as it were, sufficient in and by itself, and does not need anything but its own inherent harmonies of line and hue to impress itself on the beholders.

There were some, indeed, who maintained that the smallness and delicacy of her features was out of keeping with her stature and her ample gliding motions. But here, again, the impression of delicacy was transformed half way into one of brilliancy by the large hazel eyes and the vivid whiteness of the skin. Kendal watched her from his corner, where his conversation with two musical young ladies had been suddenly suspended by the arrival of the actress, and thought that his impression of the week before had been, if anything, below the truth.

'She comes into the room well, too,' he said to himself critically; 'she is not a mere milk-maid; she has some manner, some individuality. Ah, now Fernandez'—naming the Minister—'has got hold of her. Then, I suppose, Rushbrook (the member of the Government) will come next, and we commoner mortals in our turn. What absurdities these things are!'

His reflections, however, were stopped by the exclamations of the girls beside him, who were already warm admirers of Miss Bretherton, and wild with enthusiasm at finding themselves in the same room with her. They discovered that he was going to see her in the evening; they envied him, they described the play to him, they dwelt in superlatives on the crowded state of the theatre and on the plaudits which greeted Miss Bretherton's first appearance in the ballroom scene in the first act, and they allowed themselves—being æsthetic damsels robed in sober greenish-grays—a gentle lament over the somewhat violent colouring of one of the actress's costumes, while all the time keeping their eyes furtively fixed on the gleaming animated profile and graceful shoulders

over which, in the entrance of the second drawing-room, the Minister's gray head was bending.

Mrs. Stuart did her duty bravely. Miss Bretherton had announced to her, with a thousand regrets, that she had only half an hour to give. 'We poor professionals, you know, must dine at four. That made me late, and now I find I am such a long way from home that six is the latest moment I can stay.' So that Mrs. Stuart was put to it to get through all the introductions she had promised. But she performed her task without flinching, killing remorselessly each nascent conversation in the bud, giving artist, author, or member of Parliament his proper little sentence of introduction, and at last beckoning to Eustace Kendal, who left his corner feeling society to be a foolish business, and wishing the ordeal were over.

Miss Bretherton smiled at him as she had smiled at all the others, and he sat down for his three minutes on the chair beside her.

'I hear you are satisfied with your English audiences, Miss Bretherton,' he began at once, having prepared himself so far. 'To-night I am

to have the pleasure for the first time of making one of your admirers.'

'I hope it will please you,' she said, with a shyness that was still bright and friendly. 'You will be sure to come and see me afterwards? I have been arranging it with Mrs. Stuart. I am never fit to talk to afterwards, I get so tired. But it does one good to see one's friends; it makes one forget the theatre a little before going home.'

'Do you find London very exciting?'

'Yes, very. People have been so extraordinarily kind to me, and it is all such a new experience after that little place Kingston. I should have my head turned, I think,' she added, with a happy little laugh, 'but that when one cares about one's art one is not likely to think too much of one's self. I am always despairing over what there is still to do, and what one may have done seems to make no matter.'

She spoke with a pretty humility, evidently meaning what she said, and yet there was such a delightful young triumph in her manner, such an invulnerable consciousness of artistic success, that

Kendal felt a secret stir of amusement as he recalled the criticisms which among his own set he had most commonly heard applied to her.

'Yes, indeed,' he answered pleasantly. 'I suppose every artist feels the same. We all do if we are good for anything—we who scribble as well as you who act.'

'Oh yes,' she said, with kindly, questioning eyes, 'you write a great deal? I know; Mr. Wallace told me. He says you are so learned, and that your book will be splendid. It must be grand to write books. I should like it, I think, better than acting. You need only depend on yourself; but in acting you're always depending on some one else, and you get in such a rage when all your own grand ideas are spoilt because the leading gentleman won't do anything different from what he has been used to, or the next lady wants to show off, or the stage manager has a grudge against you! Something always happens.'

'Apparently the only thing that always happens to you is success,' said Kendal, rather hating himself for the cheapness of the compliment. 'I

hear wonderful reports of the difficulty of getting a seat at the *Calliope;* and his friends tell me that Mr. Robinson looks ten years younger. Poor man! it is time that fortune smiled on him.'

'Yes, indeed; he had a bad time last year. That Miss Harwood, the American actress, that they thought would be such a success, didn't come off at all. She didn't hit the public. It doesn't seem to me that the English public is hard to please. At that wretched little theatre in Kingston I wasn't nearly so much at my ease as I am here. Here one can always do one's best and be sure that the audience will appreciate it. I have all sorts of projects in my head. Next year I shall have a theatre of my own, I think, and then——'

'And then we shall see you in all the great parts?'

The beauty had just begun her answer when Kendal became conscious of Mrs. Stuart standing beside him, with another aspirant at her elbow, and nothing remained for him but to retire with a hasty smile and handshake, Miss Bretherton

brightly reminding him that they should meet again.'

A few minutes afterwards there was once more a general flutter in the room. Miss Bretherton was going. She came forward in her long-flowing black garments, holding Mrs. Stuart by the hand, the crowd dividing as she passed. On her way to the door stood a child, Mrs. Stuart's youngest, looking at her with large wondering brown eyes, and finger on lip. The actress suddenly stooped to her, lifted her up with the ease of physical strength into the midst of her soft furs and velvets, and kissed her with a gracious queenliness. The child threw its little white arms around her, smiled upon her, and smoothed her hair, as though to assure itself that the fairy princess was real. Then it struggled down, and in another minute the bright vision was gone, and the crowded room seemed to have grown suddenly dull and empty.

'That was prettily done,' said Edward Wallace to Kendal as they stood together looking on. 'In another woman those things would be done for effect, but I don't think she does them for

effect. It is as though she felt herself in such a warm and congenial atmosphere, she is so sure of herself and her surroundings, that she is able to give herself full play, to follow every impulse as it rises. There is a wonderful absence of *mauvaise honte* about her, and yet I believe that, little as she knows of her own deficiencies, she is really modest——'

'Very possibly,' said Kendal; 'it is a curious study, a character taken so much *au naturel*, and suddenly transported into the midst of such a London triumph as this. I have certainly been very much attracted, and feel inclined to quarrel with you for having run her down. I believe I shall admire her more than you do to-night.'

'I only hope you may,' said the American cordially; 'I am afraid, however, that from any standard that is worth using there is not much to be said for her as an actress. But as a human being she is very nearly perfection.'

The afternoon guests departed, and just as the last had gone, Mr. Forbes was announced. He came in in a bad temper, having been delayed by

business, and presently sat down to dinner with Mrs. Stuart and Wallace and Kendal in a very grumbling frame of mind. Mr. Stuart, a young and able lawyer, in the first agonies of real success at the bar, had sent word that he could not reach home till late.

'I don't know, I'm sure, what's the good of going to see that girl with you two carping fellows,' he began, combatively, over his soup. 'She won't suit you, and you'll only spoil Mrs. Stuart's pleasure and mine.'

'My dear Forbes,' said Wallace in his placid undisturbed way, 'you will see I shall behave like an angel. I shall allow myself no unpleasant remarks, and I shall make as much noise as anybody in the theatre.'

'That's all very well; but if you don't say it, Kendal will look it; and I don't know which is the most damping.'

'Mrs. Stuart, you shall be the judge of our behaviour,' said Kendal, smiling—he and Forbes were excellent friends. 'Forbes is not in a judicial frame of mind, but we will trust you to be fair. I suppose, Forbes, we may be allowed

a grumble or two at Hawes if you shut our mouths on the subject of Miss Bretherton.'

'Hawes does his best,' said Forbes, with a touch of obstinacy. 'He looks well, he strides well, he is a fine figure of a man with a big bullying voice; I don't know what more you want in a German prince. It is this everlasting hypercriticism which spoils all one's pleasure and frightens all the character out of the artists!'

At which Mrs. Stuart laughed, and, woman-like, observed that she supposed it was only people who, like Forbes, had succeeded in disarming the critics, who could afford to scoff at them,—a remark which drew a funny little bow, half-petulant, half-pleased, out of the artist, in whom one of the strongest notes of character was his susceptibility to the attentions of women.

'You've seen her already, I believe,' said Wallace to Forbes. 'I think Miss Bretherton told me you were at the *Calliope* on Monday.'

'Yes, I was. Well, as I tell you, I don't care to be critical. I don't want to whittle away the few pleasures that this dull life can provide me with by this perpetual discontent with what's set

before one. Why can't you eat and be thankful? To *look* at that girl is a liberal education; she has a fine voice too, and her beauty, her freshness, the energy of life in her, give me every sort of artistic pleasure. What a curmudgeon I should be—what a grudging, ungrateful fellow, if, after all she has done to delight me, I should abuse her because she can't speak out her tiresome speeches—which are of no account, and don't matter, to my impression at all,—as well as one of your thin, French, snake-like creatures who have nothing but their *art*, as you call it; nothing but what they have been carefully taught, nothing but what they have laboriously learnt with time and trouble, to depend upon!'

Having delivered himself of this tirade, the artist threw himself back in his chair, tossed back his gray hair from his glowing black eyes, and looked defiance at Kendal, who was sitting opposite.

'But, after all,' said Kendal, roused, 'these tiresome speeches are her *métier*; it's her business to speak them, and to speak them well. You are praising her for qualities which are not

properly dramatic at all. In your studio they would be the only thing that a man need consider; on the stage they naturally come second.'

'Ah, well,' said Forbes, falling to upon his dinner again at a gentle signal from Mrs. Stuart that the carriage would soon be round, 'I knew very well how you and Wallace would take her. You and I will have to defend each other, Mrs. Stuart, against those two shower-baths, and when we go to see her afterwards I shall be invaluable, for I shall be able to save Kendal and Wallace the humbug of compliments.'

Whereupon the others protested that they would on no account be deprived of their share of the compliments, and Wallace especially laid it down that a man would be a poor creature who could not find smooth things to say upon any conceivable occasion to Isabel Bretherton. Besides, he saw her every day, and was in excellent practice. Forbes looked a little scornful, but at this point Mrs. Stuart succeeded in diverting his attention to his latest picture, and the dinner flowed on pleasantly till the coffee was handed and the carriage announced.

CHAPTER III.

On their arrival at the theatre, armed with Miss Bretherton's order, Mrs. Stuart's party found themselves shown into a large roomy box close to the stage—too close, indeed, for purposes of seeing well. The house was already crowded, and Kendal noticed, as he scanned the stalls and boxes through his opera-glass, that it contained a considerable sprinkling of notabilities of various kinds. It was a large new theatre, which hitherto had enjoyed but a very moderate share of popular favour, so that the brilliant and eager crowd with which it was now filled was in itself a sufficient testimony to the success of the actress who had wrought so great a transformation.

'What an experience this is for a girl of twenty-one,' whispered Kendal to Mrs. Stuart, who was comfortably settled in the farther corner of the box, her small dainty figure set off by the

crimson curtains behind it. 'One would think that an actor's life must stir the very depths of a man or woman's individuality, that it must call every power into action, and strike sparks out of the dullest.'

'Yes; but how seldom it is so!'

'Well, in England, at any rate, the fact is, their training is so imperfect they daren't let themselves go. It's only when a man possesses the lower secrets of his art perfectly that he can aim at the higher. But the band is nearly through the overture. Just tell me before the curtain goes up something about the play. I have only very vague ideas about it. The scene is laid at Berlin?'

'Yes; in the Altes Schloss at Berlin. The story is based upon the legend of the White Lady.'

'What? the warning phantom of the Hohenzollerns?'

Mrs. Stuart nodded. 'A Crown-Prince of Prussia is in love with the beautiful Countess Hilda von Weissenstein. Reasons of State, however, oblige him to throw her over and to take steps towards marriage with a Princess of Würtemberg. They have just been betrothed when the Countess,

mad with jealousy, plays the part of the White Lady and appears to the Princess, to try and terrify her out of the proposed marriage.'

'And the Countess is Miss Bretherton?'

'Yes. Of course the malicious people say that her get-up as the White Lady is really the *raison d'être* of the piece. But, hush! there is the signal. Make up your mind to be bored by the Princess; she is one of the worst sticks I ever saw!'

The first scene represented the ballroom at the Schloss, or rather the royal anteroom, beyond which the vista of the ballroom opened. The Prussian and Würtemberg royalties had not yet arrived, with the exception of the Prince Wilhelm, on whose matrimonial prospects the play was to turn. He was engaged in explaining the situation to his friend, Waldemar von Rothenfels, the difficulties in which he was placed, his passion for the Countess Hilda, the political necessities which forced him to marry a daughter of the House of Würtemberg, the pressure brought to bear upon him by his parents, and his own despair at having to break the news to the Countess.

The story is broken off by the arrival of the royalties, including the pink-and-white maiden who is to be Prince Wilhelm's fate, and the royal quadrille begins. The Prince leads his Princess to her place, when it is discovered that another lady is required to complete the figure, and an *aide-de-camp* is despatched into the ballroom to fetch one. He returns, ushering in the beautiful Hilda von Weissenstein.

For this moment the audience had been impatiently waiting, and when the dazzling figure in its trailing, pearl-embroidered robes appeared in the doorway of the ballroom, a storm of applause broke forth again and again, and for some minutes delayed the progress of the scene.

Nothing, indeed, could have been better calculated than this opening to display the peculiar gifts of the actress. The quadrille was a stately spectacular display, in which splendid dress and stirring music and the effects of rhythmic motion had been brought freely into play for the delight of the beholders. Between the figures there was a little skilfully-managed action, mostly in dumb show. The movements of the jealous beauty and of her

faithless lover were invested throughout with sufficient dramatic meaning to keep up the thread of the play. But it was not the dramatic aspect of the scene for which the audience cared, it was simply for the display which it made possible of Isabel Bretherton's youth and grace and loveliness. They hung upon her every movement, and Kendal found himself following her with the same eagerness of eye as those about him, lest any phase of that embodied poetry should escape him.

In this introductory scene, the elements which went to make up the spell she exercised over her audience were perfectly distinguishable. Kendal's explanation of it to himself was that it was based upon an exceptional natural endowment of physical perfection, informed and spiritualised by certain moral qualities, by simplicity, frankness, truth of nature. There was a kind of effluence of youth, of purity, of strength, about her which it was impossible not to feel, and which evidently roused the enthusiastic sympathy of the great majority of those who saw her.

Forbes was sitting in the front of the box with Mrs. Stuart, his shaggy gray head and keen

lined face attracting considerable attention in their neighbourhood. He was in his most expansive mood; the combativeness of an hour before had disappeared, and the ardent susceptible temperament of the man was absorbed in admiration, in the mere sensuous artist's delight in a stirring and beautiful series of impressions. When the white dress disappeared through the doorway of the ballroom, he followed it with a sigh of regret, and during the scene which followed between the Prince and his intended bride, he hardly looked at the stage. The Princess, indeed, was all that Mrs. Stuart had pronounced her to be; she was stiffer and clumsier than even her Teutonic *rôle* could justify, and she marched laboriously through her very proper and virtuous speeches, evidently driven on by an uneasy consciousness that the audience was only eager to come to the end of them and of her.

In the little pause which followed the disappearance of the newly-betrothed pair into the distant ballroom, Mrs. Stuart leant backward over her chair and said to Kendal:

'Now then, Mr. Kendal, prepare your criticisms!

In the scene which is just coming Miss Bretherton has a good deal more to do than to look pretty!'

'Oh, but you forget our compact!' said Kendal. 'Remember you are to be the judge of our behaviour at the end. It is not the part of a judge to tempt those on whom he is to deliver judgment to crime.'

'Don't put too much violence on yourselves!' said Mrs. Stuart, laughing. 'You and Edward can have the back of the box to talk what heresy you like in, so long as you let Mr. Forbes perform his devotions undisturbed.'

At this Forbes half turned round, and shook his great mane, under which gleamed a countenance of comedy menace, at the two men behind him. But in another instant the tones of Isabel Bretherton's voice riveted his attention, and the eyes of all those in the box were once more turned towards the stage.

The scene which followed was one of the most meritorious passages in the rather heavy German play from which the *White Lady* had been adapted. It was intended to show the romantic

and passionate character of the Countess, and to suggest that vein of extravagance and daring in her which was the explanation of the subsequent acts. In the original the dialogue had a certain German force and intensity, which lost nothing of its occasional heaviness in the mouth of Hawes, the large-boned swaggering personage who played the Prince. An actress with sufficient force of feeling, and an artistic sense subtle enough to suggest to her the necessary modulations, could have made a great mark in it. But the first words, almost, revealed Isabel Bretherton's limitations, and before two minutes were over Kendal was conscious of a complete collapse of that sympathetic relation between him and the actress which the first scene had produced. In another sentence or two the spell had been irrevocably broken, and he seemed to himself to have passed from a state of sensitiveness to all that was exquisite and rare in her to a state of mere irritable consciousness of her defects. It was evident to him that in a scene of great capabilities she never once rose beyond the tricks of an elementary elocution, that her violence

had a touch of commonness in it which was almost vulgarity, and that even her attitudes had lost half their charm. For, in the effort—the conscious and laboured effort of acting—her movements, which had exercised such an enchantment over him in the first scene, had become mere strides and rushes, never indeed without grace, but often without dignity, and at all times lacking in that consistency, that unity of plan which is the soul of art.

The sense of chill and disillusion was extremely disagreeable to him, and, by the time the scene was half-way through, he had almost ceased to watch her. Edward Wallace, who had seen her some two or three times in the part, was perfectly conscious of the change, and had been looking out for it.

'Not much to be said for her, I am afraid, when she comes to business,' he said to Kendal in a whisper, as the two leant against the door of the box. 'Where did she get those tiresome tricks she has, that see-saw intonation she puts on when she wants to be pathetic, and that absurd restlessness which spoils everything? It's a terrible

pity. Sometimes I think I catch a gleam of some original power at the bottom, but there is such a lack of intelligence—in the artist's sense. It is a striking instance of how much and how little can be done without education.'

'It is curiously bad, certainly,' said Kendal, while the actress's denunciations of her lover were still ringing through the theatre. 'But look at the house! What folly it is ever to expect a great dramatic art in England. We have no sense for the rudiments of the thing. The French would no more tolerate such acting as this because of the beauty of the actress than they would judge a picture by its frame. However, if men like Forbes leave their judgment behind them, it's no wonder if commoner mortals follow suit.'

'There!' said Wallace, with a sigh of relief as the curtain fell on the first act, 'that's done with. There are two or three things in the second act that are beautiful. In her first appearance as the White Lady she is as wonderful as ever, but the third act is a nuisance——'

'No whispering there,' said Forbes, looking round upon them. 'Oh, I know what you're

after, Edward, perfectly. I hear it all with one ear.'

'That,' said Wallace, moving up to him, 'is physically impossible. Don't be so pugnacious. We leave you the front of the box, and when we appear in your territory our mouths are closed. But in our own domain we claim the rights of free men.'

'Poor girl!' said Forbes, with a sigh. 'How she manages to tame London as she does is a marvel to me! If she were a shade less perfect and wonderful than she is, she would have been torn to pieces by you critics long ago. You have done your best as it is, only the public won't listen to you. Oh, don't suppose I don't see all that you see. The critical poison's in my veins just as it is in yours, but I hold it in check—it shan't master me. I will have my pleasure in spite of it, and when I come across anything in life that makes me *feel*, I will protect my feeling from it with all my might.'

'We are dumb,' said Kendal, with a smile; 'otherwise I would pedantically ask you to con-

sider what are the feelings to which the dramatic art properly and legitimately appeals.'

'Oh, hang your dramatic art,' said Forbes, firing up; 'can't you take things simply and straightforwardly. She is there—she is doing her best for you—there isn't a movement or a look which isn't as glorious as that of a Diana come to earth, and you won't let it charm you and conquer you, because she isn't into the bargain as confoundedly clever as you are yourselves! Well, it's your loss, not hers.'

'My dear Mr. Forbes,' said Mrs. Stuart, with her little judicial peace-making air, 'we shall all go away contented. You will have had your sensation, they will have had their sense of superiority, and, as for me, I shall get the best of it all round. For, while you are here, I see Miss Bretherton with your eyes, and yet, as Edward will get hold of me on the way home, I shan't go to bed without having experienced all the joys of criticism! Oh! but now hush, and listen to this music. It is one of the best things in the evening, and we shall have the White Lady directly.'

As she spoke, the orchestra, which was a good

one, and perhaps the most satisfactory feature in the performance, broke into some weird Mendelssohnian music, and when the note of plaintiveness and mystery had been well established, the curtain rose upon the great armoury of the castle, a dim indistinguishable light shining upon its fretted roof and masses of faintly-gleaming steel. The scene which followed, in which the Countess Hilda, disguised as the traditional phantom of the Hohenzollerns, whose appearance bodes misfortune and death to those who behold it, throws herself across the path of her rival in the hope of driving her and those interested in her by sheer force of terror from the castle and from Berlin, had been poetically conceived, and it furnished Miss Bretherton with an admirable opportunity. As the White Lady, gliding between rows of armed and spectral figures on either hand, and startling the Princess and her companion by her sudden apparition in a gleam of moonlight across the floor, she was once more the representative of all that is most poetical and romantic in physical beauty. Nay, more than this; as she flung her white arms above her head, or pointed to the

shrinking and fainting figure of her rival while she uttered her wailing traditional prophecy of woe, her whole personality seemed to be invested with a dramatic force of which there had been no trace in the long and violent scene with the Prince. It was as though she was in some sort capable of expressing herself in action and movement, while in all the arts of speech she was a mere crude novice. At any rate, there could be no doubt that in this one scene she realised the utmost limits of the author's ideal, and when she faded into the darkness beyond the moonlight in which she had first appeared, the house, which had been breathlessly silent during the progress of the apparition, burst into a roar of applause, in which Wallace and Kendal heartily joined.

'Exquisite!' said Kendal in Mrs. Stuart's ear, as he stood behind her chair. 'She was romance itself! Her acting should always be a kind of glorified and poetical pantomime; she would be inimitable so.'

Mrs. Stuart looked up and smiled agreement. 'Yes, that scene lives with one. If everything

else in the play is poor, she is worth seeing for that alone. *Remember it!*'

The little warning was in season, for the poor White Lady had but too many after opportunities of blurring the impression she had made. In the great situation at the end of the second act, in which the Countess has to give, in the presence of the Court, a summary of the supposed story of the White Lady, her passion at once of love and hatred charges it with a force and meaning which, for the first time, rouses the suspicions of the Prince as to the reality of the supposed apparition. In the two or three fine and dramatic speeches which the situation involved, the actress showed the same absence of knowledge and resources as before, the same powerlessness to create a personality, the same lack of all those quicker and more delicate perceptions which we include under the general term 'refinement,' and which, in the practice of any art, are the outcome of long and complex processes of education. There, indeed, was the bald, plain fact—the whole explanation of her failure as an artist lay in her lack both of the lower and of the higher kinds of education.

It was evident that her technical training had been of the roughest. In all technical respects, indeed, her acting had a self-taught, provincial air, which showed you that she had natural cleverness, but that her models had been of the poorest type. And in all other respects—when it came to interpretation or creation—she was spoilt by her entire want of that inheritance from the past which is the foundation of all good work in the present. For an actress must have one of the two kinds of knowledge: she must have either the knowledge which comes from a fine training—in itself the outcome of a long tradition—or she must have the knowledge which comes from mere living, from the accumulations of personal thought and experience. Miss Bretherton had neither. She had extraordinary beauty and charm, and certainly, as Kendal admitted, some original quickness. He was not inclined to go so far as to call it 'power.' But this quickness, which would have been promising in a *débutante* less richly endowed on the physical side, seemed to him to have no future in her. 'It will be checked,' he said to himself, 'by her beauty and

all that flows from it. She must come to depend more and more on the physical charm, and on that only. The whole pressure of her success is and will be that way.'

Miss Bretherton's inadequacy, indeed, became more and more visible as the play was gradually and finely worked up to its climax in the last act. In the final scene of all, the Prince, who, by a series of accidents has discovered the Countess Hilda's plans, lies in wait for her in the armoury, where he has reason to know she means to try the effect of a third and last apparition upon the Princess. She appears; he suddenly confronts her; and, dragging her forward, unveils before himself and the Princess the death-like features of his old love. Recovering from the shock of detection, the Countess pours out upon them both a fury of jealous passion, sinking by degrees into a pathetic, trance-like invocation of the past, under the spell of which the Prince's anger melts away, and the little Princess's terror and excitement change into eager pity. Then, when she sees him almost reconquered, and her rival weeping beside her, she takes the poison phial from her

breast, drinks it, and dies in the arms of the man for whose sake she has sacrificed beauty, character, and life itself.

A great actress could hardly have wished for a better opportunity. The scene was so obviously beyond Miss Bretherton's resources that even the enthusiastic house, Kendal fancied, cooled down during the progress of it. There were signs of restlessness, there was even a little talking in some of the back rows, and at no time during the scene was there any of that breathless absorption in what was passing on the stage which the dramatic material itself amply deserved.

'I don't think this will last very long,' said Kendal in Wallace's ear. 'There is something tragic in a popularity like this; it rests on something unsound, and one feels that disaster is not far off. The whole thing impresses me most painfully. She has some capacity, of course; if only the conditions had been different—if she had been born within a hundred miles of the Paris Conservatoire, if her youth had been passed in a society of more intellectual weight,—but, as it is,

this very applause is ominous, for the beauty must go sooner or later, and there is nothing else.'

'You remember Desforêts in this same theatre last year in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*?' said Wallace. 'What a gulf between the right thing and the wrong! But come, we must do our duty;' and he drew Kendal forward towards the front of the box, and they saw the whole house on its feet, clapping and shouting, and the curtain just being drawn back to let the White Lady and the Prince appear before it. She was very pale, but the storm of applause which greeted her seemed to revive her, and she swept her smiling glance round the theatre, until at last it rested with a special gleam of recognition on the party in the box, especially on Forbes, who was outdoing himself in enthusiasm. She was called forward again and again, until at last the house was content, and the general exit began.

The instant after her white dress had disappeared from the stage, a little page-boy knocked at the door of the box with a message that 'Miss

Bretherton begs that Mrs. Stuart and her friends will come and see her.' Out they all trooped, along a narrow passage, and up a short staircase, until a rough temporary door was thrown open, and they found themselves in the wings, the great stage, on which the scenery was being hastily shifted, lying to their right. The lights were being put out; only a few gas-jets were left burning round a pillar, beside which stood Isabel Bretherton, her long phantom dress lying in white folds about her, her uncle and aunt and her manager standing near. Every detail of the picture —the spot of brilliant light bounded on all sides by dim, far-reaching vistas of shadow, the figures hurrying across the back of the stage, the moving ghost-like workmen all around, and in the midst that white-hooded, languid figure—revived in Kendal's memory whenever in after days his thoughts went wandering back to the first moment of real contact between his own personality and that of Isabel Bretherton.

CHAPTER IV.

A FEW days after the performance of the *White Lady*, Kendal, in the course of his weekly letter to his sister, sent her a fairly-detailed account of the evening, including the interview with her after the play, which had left two or three very marked impressions upon him. 'I wish,' he wrote, 'I could only convey to you a sense of her personal charm such as might balance the impression of her artistic defects, which I suppose this account of mine cannot but leave on you. When I came away that night after our conversation with her I had entirely forgotten her failure as an actress, and it is only later, since I have thought over the evening in detail, that I have returned to my first standpoint of wonder at the easy toleration of the English public. When you are actually with her, talking to her, looking at her, Forbes's attitude is the only possible and reasonable one. What

does art, or cultivation, or training matter!—I found myself saying, as I walked home, in echo of him,—so long as Nature will only condescend once in a hundred years to produce for us a creature so perfect, so finely fashioned to all beautiful uses! Let other people go through the toil to acquire; their aim is truth: but here is beauty in its quintessence, and what is beauty but three parts of truth? Beauty is harmony with the universal order, a revelation of laws and perfections of which, in our common groping through a dull world, we find in general nothing to remind us. And if so, what folly to ask of a human creature that it should be more than beautiful! It is a messenger from the gods, and we treat it as if it were any common traveller along the highway of life, and cross-examine it for its credentials instead of raising our altar and sacrificing to it with grateful hearts!

'That was my latest impression of Friday night. But, naturally, by Saturday morning I had returned to the rational point of view. The mind's morning climate is removed by many degrees from that of the evening; and the critical

revolt which the whole spectacle of the *White Lady* had originally roused in me revived in all its force. I began, indeed, to feel as if I and humanity, with its long laborious tradition, were on one side, holding our own against a young and arrogant aggressor—namely, beauty, in the person of Miss Bretherton! How many men and women, I thought, have laboured and struggled and died in the effort to reach a higher and higher perfection in one single art, and are they to be outdone, eclipsed in a moment, by something which is a mere freak of nature, something which, like the lilies of the field, has neither toiled nor spun, and yet claims the special inheritance and reward of those who have! It seemed to me as though my feeling in her presence of the night before, as if the sudden overthrow of the critical resistance in me had been a kind of treachery to the human cause. Beauty has power enough, I found myself reflecting with some fierceness,—let us withhold from her a sway and a prerogative which are not rightfully hers; let us defend against her that store of human sympathy which is the proper reward, not of her facile and heaven-born perfec-

tions, but of labour and intelligence, of all that is complex and tenacious in the workings of the human spirit.

'And then, as my mood cooled still further, I began to recall many an evening at the *Français* with you, and one part after another, one actor after another, recurred to me, till, as I realised afresh what dramatic intelligence and dramatic training really are, I fell into an angry contempt for our lavish English enthusiasms. Poor girl! it is not her fault if she believes herself to be a great actress. Brought up under misleading conditions, and without any but the most elementary education, how is she to know what the real thing means? She finds herself the rage within a few weeks of her appearance in the greatest city of the world. Naturally, she pays no heed to her critics,—why would she?

'And she is indeed a most perplexing mixture. Do what I will I cannot harmonise all my different impressions of her. Let me begin again. Why is it that her acting is so poor? I never saw a more dramatic personality! Everything that she says or does is said or done with a

warmth, a force, a vivacity that make her smallest gesture and her lightest tone impress themselves upon you. I felt this very strongly two or three times after the play on Friday night. In her talk with Forbes, for instance, whom she has altogether in her toils, and whom she plays with as though he were the gray-headed Merlin and she an innocent Vivien, weaving harmless spells about him. And then, from this mocking war of words and looks, this gay camaraderie, in which there was not a scrap of coquetry or self-consciousness, she would pass into a sudden outburst of anger as to the impertinence of English rich people—the impertinence of rich millionaires who have tried once or twice to "order" her for their evening parties as they would order their ices, or the impertinence of the young "swell about town" who thinks she has nothing to do behind the scenes but receive his visits and provide him with entertainment. And, as the quick impetuous words came rushing out, you felt that here for once was a woman speaking her real mind to you, and that with a flashing eye and curving lip, an inborn grace and energy which made every

word memorable. If she would but look like that or speak like that on the stage! But there, of course, is the rub. The whole difficulty of art consists in losing your own personality, so to speak, and finding it again transformed, and it is a difficulty which Miss Bretherton has never even understood.

'After this impression of spontaneity and natural force, I think what struck me most was the physical effect London has already exercised upon her in six weeks. She looks superbly sound and healthy; she is tall and fully developed, and her colour, for all its delicacy, is pure and glowing. But, after all, she was born in a languid tropical climate, and it is the nervous strain, the rush, the incessant occupation of London which seem to be telling upon her. She gave me two or three times a painful impression of fatigue on Friday—fatigue and something like depression. After twenty minutes' talk she threw herself back against the iron pillar behind her, her White Lady's hood framing a face so pale and drooping that we all got up to go, feeling that it was cruelty to keep her up a minute longer. Mrs.

Stuart asked her about her Sundays, and whether she ever got out of town. "Oh," she said, with a sigh and a look at her uncle, who was standing near, "I think Sunday is the hardest day of all. It is our 'at home' day, and such crowds come—just to look at me, I suppose, for I cannot talk to a quarter of them." Whereupon Mr. Worrall said in his bland commercial way that society had its burdens as well as its pleasures, and that his dear niece could hardly escape her social duties after the flattering manner in which London had welcomed her. Miss Bretherton answered, with a sort of languid rebellion, that her social duties would soon be the death of her. But evidently she is very docile at home, and they do what they like with her. It seems to me that the uncle and aunt are a good deal shrewder than the London public; it is borne in upon me by various indications that they know exactly what their niece's popularity depends on, and that it very possibly may not be a long-lived one. Accordingly, they have determined on two things: first, that she shall make as much money for the family as can by any means be made; and,

secondly, that she shall find her way into London society, and secure, if possible, a great *parti* before the enthusiasm for her has had time to chill. One hears various stories of the uncle, all in this sense; I cannot say how true they are.

'However, the upshot of the supper-party was that next day Wallace, Forbes, and I met at Mrs. Stuart's house, and formed a Sunday League for the protection of Miss Bretherton from her family; in other words, we mean to secure that she has occasional rest and country air on Sunday—her only free day. Mrs. Stuart has already wrung out of Mrs. Worrall, by a little judicious scaring, permission to carry her off for two Sundays—one this month and one next—and Miss Bretherton's romantic side, which is curiously strong in her, has been touched by the suggestion that the second Sunday should be spent at Oxford.

'Probably for the first Sunday—a week hence—we shall go to Surrey. You remember Hugh Farnham's property near Leith Hill? I know all the farms about there from old shooting days, and there is one on the edge of some great commons which would be perfection on a May Sunday. I

will write you a full account of our day. The only rule laid down by the League is that things are to be so managed that Miss Bretherton is to have no possible excuse for fatigue so long as she is in the hands of the society.

'My book goes on fairly well. I have been making a long study of De Musset, with the result that the poems seem to me far finer than I had remembered, and the *Confessions d' un Enfant du Siècle* a miserable performance. How was it it impressed me so much when I read it first? His poems have reminded me of you at every step. Do you remember how you used to read them aloud to our mother and me after dinner, while the father had his sleep before going down to the House?'

Ten days later Kendal spent a long Monday evening in writing the following letter to his sister:—

'Our yesterday's expedition was, I think, a great success. Mrs. Stuart was happy, because she had for once induced Stuart to put away his papers and allow himself a holiday; it was Miss Bretherton's first sight of the genuine English

country, and she was like a child among the gorse and the hawthorns, while Wallace and I amused our manly selves extremely well in befriending the most beautiful woman in the British Isles, in drawing her out and watching her strong naïve impressions of things. Stuart, I think, was not quite happy. It is hardly to be expected of a lawyer in the crisis of his fortunes that he should enjoy ten hours' divorce from his briefs; but he did his best to reach the common level, and his wife, who is devoted to him, and might as well not be married at all, from the point of view of marital companionship, evidently thought him perfection. The day more than confirmed my liking for Mrs. Stuart; there are certain little follies about her; she is too apt to regard every distinguished dinner-party she and Stuart attend as an event of enormous and universal interest, and beyond London society her sympathies hardly reach, except in that vague charitable form which is rather pity and toleration than sympathy. But she is kindly, womanly, soft; she has no small jealousies and none of that petty self-consciousness which makes so many women wearisome

to the great majority of plain men, who have no wish to take their social exercises too much *au sérieux*.

'I was curious to see what sort of a relationship she and Miss Bretherton had developed towards each other. Mrs. Stuart is nothing if not cultivated; her light individuality floats easily on the stream of London thought, now with this current, now with that, but always in movement, never left behind. She has the usual literary and artistic topics at her fingers' end, and as she knows everybody, whenever the more abstract sides of a subject begin to bore her, she can fall back upon an endless store of gossip as lively, as brightly-coloured, and, on the whole, as harmless as she herself is. Miss Bretherton had till a week or two ago but two subjects—Jamaica and the stage—the latter taken in a somewhat narrow sense. Now, she has added to her store of knowledge a great number of first impressions of London notorieties, which naturally throw her mind and Mrs. Stuart's more frequently into contact with each other. But I see that, after all, Mrs. Stuart had no need of any bridges of this kind

to bring her on to common ground with Isabel Bretherton. Her strong womanliness and the leaven of warm-hearted youth still stirring in her would be quite enough of themselves, and, besides, there is her critical delight in the girl's beauty, and the little personal pride and excitement she undoubtedly feels at having, in so creditable and natural a manner, secured a hold on the most interesting person of the season. It is curious to see her forgetting her own specialities, and neglecting to make her own points, that she may bring her companion forward and set her in the best light. Miss Bretherton takes her homage very prettily; it is natural to her to be made much of, and she does not refuse it, but she in her turn evidently admires enormously her friend's social capabilities and cleverness, and she is impulsively eager to make some return for Mrs. Stuart's kindness—an eagerness which shows itself in the greatest complaisance towards all the Stuarts' friends, and in a constant watchfulness for anything which will please and flatter them.

'However, here I am as usual wasting time in analysis instead of describing to you our Sunday.

It was one of those heavenly days with which May startles us out of our winter pessimism, sky and earth seemed to be alike clothed in a young iridescent beauty. We found a carriage waiting for us at the station, and we drove along a great main road until a sudden turn landed us in a green track traversing a land of endless commons, as wild and as forsaken of human kind as though it were a region in some virgin continent. On either hand the gorse was thick and golden, great oaks, splendid in the first dazzling sharpness of their spring green, threw vast shadows over the fresh moist grass beneath, and over the lambs sleeping beside their fleecy mothers, while the hawthorns rose into the sky in masses of rose-tinted snow, each tree a shining miracle of white set in the environing blue.

'Then came the farmhouse—old, red-brick, red-tiled, casemented—everything that the æsthetic soul desires—the farmer and his wife looking out for us, and a pleasant homely meal ready in the parlour, with its last-century woodwork.

'Forbes was greatly in his element at lunch. I never knew him more racy; he gave us

worst art in England! Is the critical spirit worth something, or is it superfluous in theatrical matters and only indispensable in matters of painting! I think he caught the challenge in my eye, for he evidently felt himself in some little difficulty.

'"Oh, you couldn't," he said with a groan, "you couldn't like that ballroom,—and that troubadour, Heaven forgive us! Well, there must be something in it,—there must be something in it, if it really gives you pleasure,—I daresay there is; we're so confoundedly uppish in the way we look at things. If either of them had a particle of drawing or a scrap of taste, if both of them weren't as bare as a broomstick of the least vestige of gift, or any suspicion of knowledge, there might be a good deal to say for them! Only, my dear Miss Bretherton, you see it's really not a matter of opinion; I assure you it isn't. I could prove to you as plain as that two and two make four, that Halford's figures don't join in the middle, and that Forth's men and women are as flat as my hand—there isn't a back among them! And then the taste, and the colour, and the clap-trap idiocy

of the sentiment! No, I don't think I can stand it. I am all for people getting enjoyment where they can," with a defiant look at me, "and snapping their fingers at the critics. But one must draw the line somewhere. There's some art that's out of court from the beginning."

'I couldn't resist it.

'"Don't listen to him, Miss Bretherton," I cried. "If I were you I wouldn't let him spoil your pleasure; the great thing is to *feel*; defend your feeling against him! It's worth more than his criticisms."

'Forbes's eyes looked laughing daggers at me from under his shaggy white brows. Mrs. Stuart and Wallace kept their countenances to perfection; but I had him, there's no denying it.

'"Oh, I know nothing about it," said Isabel Bretherton, divinely unconscious of the little skirmish going on around her. "You must teach me, Mr. Forbes. I only know what touches me, what I like—that's all I know in anything."

'"It's all we any of us know," said Wallace airily. "We begin with 'I like' and 'I don't like,' then we begin to be proud, and make

distinctions and find reasons; but the thing beats us, and we come back in the end to 'I like' and 'I don't like.'"

'The lunch over, we strolled out along the common, through heather which as yet was a mere brown expanse of flowerless undergrowth, and copses which overhead were a canopy of golden oak-leaf, and carpeted underneath with primroses and the young up-curling bracken. Presently through a little wood we came upon a pond lying wide and blue before us under the breezy May sky, its shores fringed with scented fir-wood and the whole air alive with birds. We sat down under a pile of logs fresh-cut and fragrant, and talked away vigorously. It was a little difficult often to keep the conversation on lines which did not exclude Miss Bretherton. Forbes, the Stuarts, Wallace, and I are accustomed to be together, and one never realises what a freemasonry the intercourse even of a capital is until one tries to introduce an outsider into it. We talked the theatre, of course, the ways of different actors, the fortunes of managers. Isabel Bretherton naturally has as yet seen very

little; her comments were mainly personal, and all of a friendly, enthusiastic kind, for the profession has been very cordial to her. A month or five weeks more and her engagement at the *Calliope* will be over. There are other theatres open to her, of course, and all the managers are at her feet; but she has set her heart upon going abroad for some time, and has, I imagine, made so much money this season that the family cannot in decency object to her having her own way. "I am wild to get to Italy," she said to me in her emphatic, impetuous way. "Sir Walter Rutherford has talked to me so much about it that I am beginning to dream of it. I long to have done with London and be off! This English sun seems to me so chilly," and she drew her winter cloak about her with a little shiver, although the day was really an English summer day, and Mrs. Stuart was in cotton. "I come from such warmth, and I loved it. I have been making acquaintance with all sorts of horrors since I came to London—face-ache and rheumatism and colds!—I scarcely knew there were such things in the world. And

I never knew what it was to be tired before. Sometimes I can hardly drag through my work. I hate it so: it makes me cross like a naughty child!"

'"Do you know," I said, flinging myself down beside her on the grass and looking up at her, "that it's altogether wrong? Nature never meant you to feel tired; it's monstrous, it's against the natural order of things!"

'"It's London," she said, with her little sigh and the drooping lip that is so prettily pathetic. "I have the roar in my ears all day, and it seems to be humming through my sleep at night. And then the crowd, and the hurry people are in, and the quickness and sharpness of things! But I have only a few weeks more," she added, brightening, "and then by October I shall be more used to Europe—the climate and the life."

'I am much impressed, and so is Mrs. Stuart, by the struggle her nervous strength is making against London. All my nursing of you, Marie, and of our mother has taught me to notice these things in women, and I find myself taking often a very physical and medical view of Miss

Bretherton. You see, it is a case of a northern temperament and constitution relaxed by tropical conditions, and then exposed once more in an exceptional degree to the strain and stress of northern life. I rage when I think of such a piece of physical excellence marred and dimmed by our harsh English struggle. And all for what? For a commonplace, make-believe art, vulgarising in the long run both to the artist and the public! There is a sense of tragic waste about it. Suppose London destroys her health —there are some signs of it—what a futile, ironical pathos there would be in it. I long to step in, to "have at" somebody, to stop it.

'A little incident later on threw a curious light upon her. We had moved on to the other side of the pond and were basking in the firwood. The afternoon sun was slanting through the branches on to the bosom of the pond; a splendid Scotch fir just beside us tossed out its red-limbed branches over a great bed of green reeds, starred here and there with yellow irises. The woman from the keeper's cottage near had brought us out some tea, and most of us had fallen into

a sybaritic frame of mind in which talk seemed to be a burden on the silence and easeful peace of the scene. Suddenly Wallace and Forbes fell upon the question of Balzac, of whom Wallace has been making a study lately, and were soon landed in a discussion of Balzac's method of character-drawing. Are Eugène de Rastignac, le Père Goriot, and old Grandet real beings or mere incarnations of qualities, mathematical deductions from a given point? At last I was drawn in, and the Stuarts: Stuart has trained his wife in Balzac, and she has a dry original way of judging a novel, which is stimulating and keeps the ball rolling. It was the first time that the talk had not centred in one way or another round Miss Bretherton, who, of course, was the first consideration throughout the day in all our minds. We grew vehement and forgetful, till at last a little movement of hers diverted the general current. She had taken off her hat and was leaning back against the oak under which she sat, watching with parted lips and a gaze of the purest delight and wonder the movements of a nut-hatch overhead, a creature of the woodpecker

kind, with delicate purple gray plumage, who was tapping the branch above her for insects with his large disproportionate bill, and then skimming along to a sand-bank a little distance off, where he disappeared with his prey into his nest.

'"Ha!" said Wallace, who is a bird-lover, "a truce to Balzac, and let us watch those nut-hatches! Miss Bretherton's quite right to prefer them to French novels."

'"French novels!" she said, withdrawing her eyes from the branch above her, and frowning a little at Wallace as she spoke. "Please don't expect me to talk about them—I know nothing about them—I have never wished to."

'Her voice had a tone almost of hauteur in it. I have noticed it before. It is the tone of the famous actress accustomed to believe in herself and her own opinion. I connected it, too, with all one hears of her determination to look upon herself as charged with a mission for the reform of stage morals. French novels and French actresses! apparently she regards them all as so many unknown horrors, standing in the way of the

purification of dramatic art by a beautiful young person with a high standard of duty. It is very odd! Evidently she is the Scotch Presbyterian's daughter still, for all her profession, and her success, and her easy ways with the Sabbath! Her remark produced a good deal of unregenerate irritation in me. If she were a first-rate artist to begin with, I was inclined to reflect, this moral enthusiasm would touch and charm one a good deal more; as it is, considering her position, it is rather putting the cart before the horse. But, of course, one can understand that it is just these traits in her that help her to make the impression she does on London society and the orthodox public in general.

'Wallace and I went off after the nut-hatches, enjoying a private laugh by the way over Mrs. Stuart's little look of amazement and discomfort as Miss Bretherton delivered herself. When we came back we found Forbes sketching her—she sitting rather flushed and silent under the tree, and he drawing away and working himself at every stroke into a greater and greater enthusiasm. And certainly she was as beautiful as a dream,

sitting against that tree, with the brown heather about her and the young oak-leaves overhead. But I returned in an antagonistic frame of mind, a little out of patience with her and her beauty, and wondering why Nature always blunders somewhere!

'However, on the way home she had another and a pleasanter surprise for me. A carriage was waiting for us on the main road, and we strolled towards it through the gorse and the trees and the rich level evening lights. I dropped behind for some primroses still lingering in bloom beside a little brook; she stayed too, and we were together, out of ear-shot of the rest.

'"Mr. Kendal," she said, looking straight at me, as I handed the flowers to her, "you may have misunderstood something just now. I don't want to pretend to what I haven't got. I don't know French, and I can't read French novels if I wished to ever so much."

'What was I to say? She stood looking at me seriously, a little proudly, having eased her conscience, as it seemed to me, at some cost to herself. I felt at first inclined to turn the thing off

with a jest, but suddenly I thought to myself that I too would speak my mind.

'"Well," I said deliberately, walking on beside her; "you lose a good deal. There are hosts of French novels which I would rather not see a woman touch with the tips of her fingers; but there are others, which take one into a bigger world than we English people with our parochial ways of writing and seeing have any notion of. George Sand carries you full into the mid-European stream—you feel it flowing, you are brought into contact with all the great ideas, all the big interests; she is an education in herself. And then Balzac! he has such a range and breadth, he teaches one so much of human nature, and with such conscience, such force of representation! It's the same with their novels as with their theatre. Whatever other faults he may have, a first-rate Frenchman of the artistic sort takes more pains over his work than anybody else in the world. They don't shirk, they throw their life-blood into it, whether it's acting, or painting, or writing. You've never seen Desforêts, I think?—no, of course not, and you

will be gone before she comes again. What a pity!"

'Miss Bretherton picked one of my primroses ruthlessly to pieces, and flung it away from her with one of her nervous gestures. "I am not sorry," she said. "Nothing would have induced me to go and see her."

'"Indeed!" I said, waiting a little curiously for what she would say next.

'"It's not that I am jealous of her," she exclaimed, with a quick proud look at me; "not that I don't believe she's a great actress; but I can't separate her acting from what she is herself. It is women like that who bring discredit on the whole profession—it is women like that who make people think that no good woman can be an actress. I resent it, and I mean to take the other line. I want to prove, if I can, that a woman may be an actress and still be a lady, still be treated just as you treat the women you know and respect! I mean to prove that there need never be a word breathed against her, that she is anybody's equal, and that her private life is her own, and not the public's! It makes

my blood boil to hear the way people—especially men—talk about Madame Desforêts; there is not one of you who would let your wife or your sister shake hands with her, and yet how you rave about her, how you talk as if there were nothing in the world but genius—and French genius!"

'It struck me that I had got to something very much below the surface in Miss Bretherton. It was a curious outburst; I remembered how often her critics had compared her to Desforêts, greatly to her disadvantage. Was this championship of virtue quite genuine? or was it merely the best means of defending herself against a rival by the help of British respectability?

'"Mme. Desforêts," I said, perhaps a little drily, "is a riddle to her best friends, and probably to herself; she does a thousand wild, imprudent, *bad* things if you will, but she is the greatest actress the modern world has seen, and that's something to have done for your generation. To have moved the feelings and widened the knowledge of thousands by such delicate, such marvellous, such conscientious work as hers—there is an achieve-

ment so great, so masterly, that I for one will throw no stones at her!"

'It seemed to me all through as though I were speaking perversely; I could have argued on the other side as passionately as Isabel Bretherton herself; but I was thinking of her dialogue with the Prince, of that feeble, hysterical death-scene, and it irritated me that she, with her beauty, and with British Philistinism and British virtue to back her, should be trampling on Desforêts and genius. But I was conscious of my audacity. If a certain number of critics have been plain-spoken, Isabel Bretherton has none the less been surrounded for months past with people who have impressed upon her that the modern theatre is a very doubtful business, that her acting is as good as anybody's, and that her special mission is to regenerate the manners of the stage. To have the naked, artistic view thrust upon her—that it is the actress's business to *act*, and that if she does that well, whatever may be her personal shortcomings, her generation has cause to be grateful to her—must be repugnant to her. She, too, talks about art, but it is like a

child who learns a string of long words without understanding them. She walked on beside me while I cooled down and thought what a fool I had been to endanger a friendship which had opened so well,—her wonderful lips opening once or twice as though to speak, and her quick breath coming and going as she scattered the yellow petals of the flowers far and wide with a sort of mute passion which sent a thrill through me. It was as though she could not trust herself to speak, and I waited awkwardly on Providence, wishing the others were not so far off. But suddenly the tension of her mood seemed to give way. Her smile flashed out, and she turned upon me with a sweet, eager graciousness, quite indescribable.

'"No, we won't throw stones at her! She *is* great, I know, but that other feeling is so strong in me. I care for my art; it seems to me grand, magnificent!—but I think I care still more for making people feel it is work a good woman can do, for holding my own in it, and asserting myself against the people who behave as if all actresses had done the things that Madame

Desforêts has done. Don't think me narrow and jealous. I should hate you and the Stuarts to think that of me. You have all been so kind to me—such good, real friends! I shall never forget this day—Oh! look, there is the carriage standing up there. I wish it was the morning and not the evening, and that it might all come again! I hate the thought of London and that hot theatre to-morrow night. Oh, my primroses! What a wretch I am! I've lost them nearly all. Look, just that bunch over there, Mr. Kendal, before we leave the common."

'I sprang to get them for her, and brought back a quantity. She took them in her hand—how unlike other women she is after all, in spite of her hatred of Bohemia!—and, raising them to her lips, she waved a farewell through them to the great common lying behind us in the evening sun. "How beautiful! how beautiful! This English country is so kind, so friendly! It has gone to my heart. Good-night, you wonderful place!"

'She had conquered me altogether. It was done so warmly—with such a winning, spon-

taneous charm. I cannot say what pleasure I got out of those primroses lying in her soft ungloved hand all the way home. Henceforward, I feel she may make what judgments and draw what lines she pleases; she won't change me, and I have some hopes of modifying her; but I am not very likely to feel annoyance towards her again. She is like some frank, beautiful, high-spirited child playing a game she only half understands. I wish she understood it better. I should like to help her to understand it—but I won't quarrel with her, even in my thoughts, any more!

'On looking over this letter it seems to me that if you were not you, and I were not I, you might with some plausibility accuse me of being —what?—in love with Miss Bretherton? But you know me too well. You know I am one of the old-fashioned people who believe in com-

munity of interests—in belonging to the same world. When I come coolly to think about it, I can hardly imagine two worlds, whether outwardly or inwardly, more wide apart than mine and Miss Bretherton's.'

CHAPTER V.

DURING the three weeks which elapsed between the two expeditions of the 'Sunday League,' Kendal saw Miss Bretherton two or three times under varying circumstances. One night he took it into his head to go to the pit of the *Calliope*, and came away more persuaded than before that as an actress there was small prospect for her. Had she been an ordinary mortal, he thought the original stuff in her might have been disciplined into something really valuable by the common give and take, the normal rubs and difficulties of her profession. But, as it was, she had been lifted at once by the force of one natural endowment into a position which, from the artistic point of view, seemed to him hopeless. Her instantaneous success—dependent as it was on considerations wholly outside those of dramatic art—had denied her all the advantages which are

to be won from struggle and from laborious and gradual conquest. And more than this, it had deprived her of an ideal; it had tended to make her take her own performance as the measure of the good and possible. For, naturally, it was too much to expect that she herself should analyse truly the sources and reasons of her popularity. She must inevitably believe that some, at least, of it was due to her dramatic talent in itself. 'Perhaps some of it is,' Kendal would answer himself. 'It is very possible that I am not quite fair to her. She has all the faults which repel me most. I could get over anything but this impression of bare blank ignorance which she makes upon me. And as things are at present, it is impossible that she should learn. It might be interesting to have the teaching of her! But it could only be done by some one with whom she came naturally into frequent contact. Nobody could thrust himself in upon her. And she seems to know very few people who could be of any use to her.'

On another occasion he came across her in the afternoon at Mrs. Stuart's. The conversation turned upon his sister, Madame de Châteauvieux,

for whom Mrs. Stuart had a warm but very respectful admiration. They had met two or three times in London, and Madame de Châteauvieux's personal distinction, her refinement, her information, her sweet urbanity of manner, had made a great impression upon the lively little woman, who, from the lower level of her own more commonplace and conventional success in society, felt an awe-struck sympathy for anything so rare, so unlike the ordinary type. Her intimacy with Miss Bretherton had not gone far before the subject of 'Mr. Kendal's interesting sister' had been introduced, and on this particular afternoon, as Kendal entered her drawing-room, his ear was caught at once by the sound of Marie's name. Miss Bretherton drew him impulsively into the conversation, and he found himself describing his sister's mode of life, her interests, her world, her belongings, with a readiness such as he was not very apt to show in the public discussion of any subject connected with himself. But Isabel Bretherton's frank curiosity, her kindling eyes and sweet parted lips, and that strain of romance in her which

made her so quickly responsive to anything which touched her imagination, were not easy to resist. She was delightful to his eye and sense, and he was as conscious as he had ever been of her delicate personal charm. Besides, it was pleasant to him to talk of that Parisian world, in which he was himself vitally interested, to any one so naïve and fresh. Her ignorance, which on the stage had annoyed him, in private life had its particular attractiveness. And, with regard to this special subject, he was conscious of breaking down a prejudice; he felt the pleasure of conquering a great reluctance in her. Evidently on starting in London she had set herself against everything that she identified with the great French actress who had absorbed the theatre-going public during the previous season; not from personal jealousy, as Kendal became ultimately convinced, but from a sense of keen moral revolt against Madame Desforêt's notorious position and the stories of her private life which were current in all circles. She had decided in her own mind that French art meant a tainted art, and she had shown herself very restive—

Kendal had seen something of it on their Surrey expedition—under any attempts to make her share the interest which certain sections of the English cultivated public feel in foreign thought, and especially in the foreign theatre. Kendal took particular pains, when they glided off from the topic of his sister to more general matters, to make her realise some of the finer aspects of the French world of which she knew so little, and which she judged so harshly; the laborious technical training to which the dwellers on the other side of the channel submit themselves so much more readily than the English in any matter of art; the intellectual conscientiousness and refinement due to the pressure of an organised and continuous tradition, and so on. He realised that a good deal of what he said or suggested must naturally be lost upon her. But it was delightful to feel her mind yielding to his, while it stimulated her sympathy and perhaps roused her surprise to find in him every now and then a grave and unpretending response to those moral enthusiasms in herself which were too real and deep for much direct expression.

'Whenever I am next in Paris,' she said to him, when she perforce rose to go, with that pretty hesitation of manner which was so attractive in her, 'would you mind—would Madame de Châteauvieux,—if I asked you to introduce me to your sister? It would be a great pleasure to me.'

Kendal made a very cordial reply, and they parted knowing more of each other than they had yet done. Not that his leading impression of her was in any way modified. Incompetent and unpromising as an artist, delightful as a woman, —had been his earliest verdict upon her, and his conviction of its reasonableness had been only deepened by subsequent experience; but perhaps the sense of delightfulness was gaining upon the sense of incompetence? After all, beauty and charm and sex have in all ages been too much for the clever people who try to reckon without them. Kendal was far too shrewd not to recognise the very natural and reasonable character of the proceeding, and not to smile at the first sign of it in his own person. Still, he meant to try, if he could, to keep the two estimates distinct,

and neither to confuse himself nor other people by confounding them. It seemed to him an intellectual point of honour to keep his head perfectly cool on the subject of Miss Bretherton's artistic claims, but he was conscious that it was not always very easy to do—a consciousness that made him sometimes all the more recalcitrant under the pressure of her celebrity.

For it seemed to him that in society he heard of nothing but her—her beauty, her fascination, and her success. At every dinner-table he heard stories of her, some of them evident inventions, but all tending in the same direction—that is to say, illustrating either the girl's proud independence and her determination to be patronised by nobody, not even by royalty itself, or her lavish kind-heartedness and generosity towards the poor and the inferiors of her own profession. She was for the moment the great interest of London, and people talked of her popularity and social prestige as a sign of the times and a proof of the changed position of the theatre and of those belonging to it. Kendal thought it proved no more than that an ex-

tremely beautiful girl of irreproachable character, brought prominently before the public in any capacity whatever, is sure to stir the susceptible English heart, and that Isabel Bretherton's popularity was not one which would in the long run affect the stage at all. But he kept his reflections to himself, and in general talked about her no more than he was forced to do. He had a sort of chivalrous feeling that those whom the girl had made in any degree her personal friends ought, as far as possible, to stand between her and this inquisitive excited public. And it was plain to him that the enormous social success was not of her seeking, but of her relations'.

One afternoon, between six and seven, Kendal was working alone in his room with the unusual prospect of a clear evening before him. He had finished a piece of writing, and was standing before the fire deep in thought over the first paragraphs of his next chapter, when he heard a knock; the door opened, and Wallace stood on the threshold.

'May I come in? It's a shame to disturb you; but I've really got something important

to talk to you about. I want your advice badly.'

'Oh, come in, by all means. Here's some cold tea; will you have some? or will you stay and dine? I must dine early to-night for my work. I'll ring and tell Mason.'

'No, don't; I can't stay. I must be in Kensington at eight.' He threw himself into Kendal's deep reading-chair, and looked up at his friend standing silent and expectant on the hearth-rug. 'Do you remember that play of mine I showed you in the spring?'

Kendal took time to think.

'Perfectly; you mean that play by that young Italian fellow which you altered and translated? I remember it quite well. I have meant to ask you about it once or twice lately.'

'You thought well of it, I know. Well, my sister has got me into the most uncomfortable hobble about it. You know I hadn't taken it to any manager. I've been keeping it by me, working it up here and there. I am in no want of money just now, and I had set my heart on the thing's being really good—well written and well

acted. Well, Agnes, in a rash moment two or three days ago, and without consulting me, told Miss Bretherton the whole story of the play, and said that she supposed I should soon want somebody to bring it out for me. Miss Bretherton was enormously struck with the plot, as Agnes told it to her, and the next time I saw her she insisted that I should read some scenes from it to her——'

'Good heavens! and now she has offered to produce it and play the principal part in it herself,' interrupted Kendal.

Wallace nodded. 'Just so; you see, my relations with her are so friendly that it was impossible for me to say no. But I never was in a greater fix. She was enthusiastic. She walked up and down the room after I'd done reading, repeating some of the passages, going through some of the situations, and wound up by saying, "Give it me, Mr. Wallace! It shall be the first thing I bring out in my October season—if you will let me have it." Well, of course, I suppose most people would jump at such an offer. Her popularity just now is something extraordinary,

and I see no signs of its lessening. Any piece she plays in is bound to be a success, and I suppose I should make a good deal of money out of it; but then, you see, I don't want the money, and——'

'Yes, yes, I see,' said Kendal, thoughtfully; 'you don't want the money, and you feel that she will ruin the play. It's a great bore certainly.'

'Well, you know, how could she help ruining it? She couldn't play the part of Elvira—you remember the plot?—even decently. It's an extremely difficult part. It would be superb—I think so, at least—in the hands of an actress who really understood her business; but Miss Bretherton will make it one long stagey scream, without any modulation, any shades, any delicacy. It drives one wild to think of it. And yet how, in the name of fortune, am I to get out of it?'

'You had thought,' said Kendal, 'I remember, of Mrs. Pearson for the heroine.'

'Yes; I should have tried her. She is not first-rate, but at least she is intelligent; she understands something of what you want in a part like that. But for poor Isabel Bretherton,

and those about her, the great points in the play will be that she will have long speeches and be able to wear "mediæval" dresses! I don't suppose she ever heard of Aragon in her life. Just imagine her playing a high-born Spanish woman of the fifteenth century! Can't you see her?'

'Well, after all,' said Kendal, with a little laugh, 'I should see what the public goes for mostly—that is to say, Isabel Bretherton in effective costume. No, it would be a great failure—not a failure, of course, in the ordinary sense. Her beauty, the mediæval get-up, and the romantic plot of the piece, would carry it through, and, as you say, you would probably make a great deal by it. But, artistically, it would be a ghastly failure. And Hawes! Hawes, I suppose, would play Macias? Good heavens!'

'Yes,' said Wallace, leaning his head on his hands and looking gloomily out of window at the spire of St. Bride's Church. 'Pleasant, isn't it? But what on earth am I to do? I never was in a greater hole. I'm not the least in love with that girl, Kendal, but there isn't anything she asked me to do for her that I wouldn't do

if I could. She's the warmest-hearted creature —one of the kindest, frankest, sincerest women that ever stepped. I feel at times that I'd rather cut my hand off than hurt her feelings by throwing her offer in her face, and yet, that play has been the apple of my eye to me for months; the thought of seeing it spoilt by clumsy handling is intolerable to me.'

'I suppose it would hurt her feelings,' said Kendal meditatively, 'if you refused?'

'Yes,' said Wallace emphatically; 'I believe it would wound her extremely. You see, in spite of all her success, she is beginning to be conscious that there are two publics in London. There is the small fastidious public of people who take the theatre seriously, and there is the large easy-going public who get the only sensation they want out of her beauty and her personal prestige. The enthusiasts have no difficulty, as yet, in holding their own against the scoffers, and for a long time Miss Bretherton knew and cared nothing for what the critical people said, but of late I have noticed at times that she knows more and cares more than she did. It seems to me that

there is a little growing soreness in her mind, and just now if I refuse to let her have that play it will destroy her confidence in her friends, as it were. She won't reproach me, she won't quarrel with me, but it will go to her heart. Do, for heaven's sake, Kendal, help me to some plausible fiction or other!'

'I wish I could,' said Kendal, pacing up and down, his gray hair falling forward over his brow. There was a pause, and then Kendal walked energetically up to his friend and laid his hand on his shoulder.

'You oughtn't to let her have that play, Wallace; I'm quite clear on that. You know how much I like her. She's all you say, and more; but art is art, and acting is acting. I, at any rate, take these things seriously, and you do too. We rejoice in it for her sake; but, after all, when one comes to think of it, this popularity of hers is enough to make one despair. Sometimes I think it will throw back the popular dramatic taste for years. At any rate, I am clear that if a man has got hold of a fine work of art, as you have in that play, he has a duty to it and to the

public. You are bound to see it brought out under the best possible conditions, and we all know that Miss Bretherton's acting, capped with Hawes's, would kill it, from the artistic point of view.'

'Perfectly true, perfectly true,' said Wallace. 'Well, would you have me tell her so?'

'You must get out of it somehow. Tell her that the part is one you feel won't suit her—won't do her justice,'

'Much good that would do! She thinks the part just made for her—costumes and all.'

'Well, then, say you haven't finished your revision, and you must have time for more work at it; that will postpone the thing, and she will hear of something else which will put it out of her head.'

'There are all sorts of reasons against that,' said Wallace; 'it's hardly worth while going through them. In the first place, she wouldn't believe me; in the second, she won't forget it, whatever happens, and it would only put the difficulty off a few weeks at most. I feel so stupid about the whole thing. I like her too

much. I'm so afraid of saying anything to hurt her, that I can't *finesse*. All my wits desert me. I say, Kendal!'

'Well?'

Wallace hesitated, and glanced up at his friend with his most winning expression.

'Do you think *you* could earn my eternal gratitude and manage the thing for me? You know we're going to Oxford next Sunday, and I suppose we shall go to Nuneham, and there will be opportunities for walks, and so on. Could you possibly take it in hand? She has an immense respect for you intellectually. If you tell her that you're sure the part won't suit her, that she won't do herself justice in it; if you could lead the conversation on to it and try to put her out of love for the scheme without seeming to have a commission from me in any way, I should be indeed everlastingly obliged! You wouldn't make a mess of it, as I should be sure to do. You'd keep your head cool.'

'Well!' said Kendal, laughing, balancing himself on the table facing Wallace. 'That's a tempting prospect! But if I don't help you out

you'll give in, I know; you're the softest of men, and I don't want you to give in.'

'Yes, of course I shall give in,' said Wallace, with smiling decision. 'If you don't want me to, suppose you take the responsibility. I've known you do difficult things before; you manage somehow to get your own way without offending people.'

'H'm,' said Kendal; 'I don't know whether that's flattering or not.' He began to walk up and down the room again cogitating. 'I don't mind trying,' he said at last, 'in a very gingerly way. I can't, of course, undertake to be brutal. It would be impossible for any one to treat *her* roughly. But there might be ways of doing it. There's time to think over the best way of doing it. Supposing, however, she took offence? Supposing, after Sunday next, she never speaks to either of us again?'

'Oh!' said Wallace, wincing, 'I should give up the play at once if she really took it to heart. She attaches one to her. I feel towards her as though she were a sister—only more interesting, because there's the charm of novelty.'

Kendal smiled. 'Miss Bretherton hasn't got to that yet with me. Sisters, to my mind, are as interesting as anybody, and more so. But how on earth, Wallace, have you escaped falling in love with her all this time?'

'Oh, I had enough of that last year,' said Wallace abruptly, rising and looking for his overcoat, while his face darkened; 'it's an experience I don't take lightly.'

Kendal was puzzled; then his thoughts quickly put two and two together. He remembered a young Canadian widow who had been a good deal at Mrs. Stuart's house the year before; he recalled certain suspicions of his own about her and his friend—her departure from London and Wallace's long absence in the country. But he said nothing, unless there was sympathy in the cordial grip of his hand as he accompanied the other to the door.

On the threshold Wallace turned irresolutely. 'It will be a risk next Sunday,' he said; 'I'm determined it shan't be anything more. She is not the woman, I think, to make a quarrel out of a thing like that.'

'Oh no,' said Kendal; 'keep your courage up.

I think it may be managed. You give me leave to handle *Elvira* as I like.'

'Oh heavens, yes!' said Wallace; 'get me out of the scrape any way you can, and I'll bless you for ever. What a brute I am never to have asked after your work! Does it get on?'

'As much as any work can in London just now. I must take it away with me somewhere into the country next month. It doesn't like dinner-parties.'

'Like me,' said Wallace, with a shrug.

'Nonsense!' said Kendal; 'you're made for them. Good-night.'

'Good-night. It's awfully good of you.'

'What? Wait till it's well over!'

Wallace ran down the stairs and was gone. Kendal walked back slowly into his room and stood meditating. It seemed to him that Wallace did not quite realise the magnificence of his self-devotion. 'For, after all, it's an awkward business,' he said to himself, shaking his head over his own temerity. 'How I am to come round a girl as frank, as direct, as unconventional as that, I don't quite know! But she ought not to have that

play; it's one of the few good things that have been done for the English stage for a long time past. It's well put together, the plot good, three or four strongly marked characters, and some fine Victor Hugoish dialogue, especially in the last act. But there is extravagance in it, as there is in all the work of that time, and in Isabel Bretherton's hands a great deal of it would be grotesque: nothing would save it but her reputation and the get-up, and that would be too great a shame. No, no; it will not do to have the real thing swamped by all sorts of irrelevant considerations in this way. I like Miss Bretherton heartily, but I like good work, and if I can save the play from her, I shall save her too from what everybody with eyes in his head would see to be a failure!'

It was a rash determination. Most men would have prudently left the matter to those whom it immediately concerned, but Kendal had a Quixotic side to him, and at this time in his life a whole-hearted devotion to certain intellectual interests, which decided his action on a point like this. In spite of his life in society, books and ideas

were at this moment much more real to him than men and women. He judged life from the standpoint of the student and the man of letters, in whose eyes considerations, which would have seemed abstract and unreal to other people, had become magnified and all-important. In this matter of Wallace and Miss Bretherton he saw the struggle between an ideal interest, so to speak, and a personal interest, and he was heart and soul for the ideal. Face to face with the living human creature concerned, his principles, as we have seen, were apt to give way a little, for the self underneath was warm-hearted and impressionable, but in his own room and by himself they were strong and vigorous, and would allow of no compromise.

He ruminated over the matter during his solitary meal, planning his line of action. 'It all depends,' he said to himself, 'on that,—if what Wallace says about her is true, if my opinion has really any weight with her, I shall be able to manage it without offending her. It's good of her to speak of me as kindly as she seems to do; I was anything but amiable on that Surrey

Sunday. However, I felt then that she liked me all the better for plain-speaking; one may be tolerably safe with her that she won't take offence unreasonably. What a picture she made as she pulled the primroses to pieces—it seemed all up with one! And then her smile flashing out—her eagerness to make amends—to sweep away a harsh impression—her pretty gratefulness —enchanting!'

On Saturday, at lunch-time, Wallace rushed in for a few minutes to say that he himself had avoided Miss Bretherton all the week, but that things were coming to a crisis. 'I've just got this note from her,' he said despairingly, spreading it out before Kendal, who was making a scrappy bachelor meal, with a book on each side of him, at a table littered with papers.

'Could anything be more prettily done? If you don't succeed to-morrow, Kendal, I shall have signed the agreement before three days are over!'

It was indeed a charming note. She asked him to fix any time he chose for an appointment with her and her business manager, and spoke with enthusiasm of the play. 'It cannot help

being a great success,' she wrote; 'I feel that I am not worthy of it, but I will do my very best. The part seems to me, in many respects, as though it had been written for me. You have never, indeed, I remember, consented in so many words to let me have *Elvira*. I thought I should meet you at Mrs. Stuart's yesterday, and was disappointed. But I am sure you will not say me nay, and you will see how grateful I shall be for the chance your work will give me.'

'Yes, that's done with real delicacy,' said Kendal. 'Not a word of the pecuniary advantages of her offer, though she must know that almost any author would give his eyes just now for such a proposal. Well, we shall see. If I can't make the thing look less attractive to her without rousing her suspicions, and if you can't screw up your courage to refuse—why, you must sign the agreement, my dear fellow, and make the best of it; you will find something else to inspire you before long.'

'It's most awkward,' sighed Wallace, as though making up his perplexed mind with difficulty. 'The great chance is that by Agnes's account she

is very much inclined to regard your opinion as a sort of intellectual standard; she has two or three times talked of remarks of yours as if they had struck her. Don't quote me at all, of course. Do it as impersonally as you can——'

'If you give me too many instructions,' said Kendal, returning the letter with a smile, 'I shall bungle it. Don't make me nervous. I can't promise you to succeed, and you mustn't bear me a grudge if I fail.'

'A grudge! No, I should think not. By the way, have you heard from Agnes about the trains to-morrow?'

'Yes, Paddington, 10 o'clock, and there is an 8.15 train back from Culham. Mrs. Stuart says we're to lunch in Balliol, run down to Nuneham afterwards, and leave the boats there, to be brought back.'

'Yes, we lunch with that friend of ours—I think you know him—Herbert Sartoris. He has been a Balliol don for about a year. I only trust the weather will be what it is to-day.'

The weather was all that the heart of man could desire, and the party met on the Paddington

platform with every prospect of another successful day. Forbes turned up punctual to the moment, and radiant under the combined influence of the sunshine and of Miss Bretherton's presence; Wallace had made all the arrangements perfectly, and the six friends found themselves presently journeying along to Oxford, at that moderated speed which is all that a Sunday express can reach. The talk flowed with zest and gaiety; the Surrey Sunday was a pleasant memory in the background, and all were glad to find themselves in the same company again. It seemed to Kendal that Miss Bretherton was looking rather thin and pale, but she would not admit it, and chattered from her corner to Forbes and himself with the mirth and *abandon* of a child on its holiday. At last the 'dreaming spires' of Oxford rose from the green, river-threaded plain, and they were at their journey's end. A few more minutes saw them alighting at the gate of the new Balliol, where stood Herbert Sartoris looking out for them. He was a young don with a classical edition on hand which kept him up working after term, within reach of the libraries, and he led the

way to some pleasant rooms overlooking the inner quadrangle of Balliol, showing in his well-bred look and manner an abundant consciousness of the enormous good fortune which had sent him Isabel Bretherton for a guest. For at that time it was almost as difficult to obtain the presence of Miss Bretherton at any social festivity as it was to obtain that of royalty. Her Sundays were the objects of conspiracies for weeks beforehand on the part of those persons in London society who were least accustomed to have their invitations refused, and to have and to hold the famous beauty for more than an hour in his own rooms, and then to enjoy the privilege of spending five or six long hours on the river with her, were delights which, as the happy young man felt, would render him the object of envy to all at least of his fellow-dons below forty.

In streamed the party, filling up the book-lined rooms and startling the two old scouts in attendance into an unwonted rapidity of action. Miss Bretherton wandered round, surveyed the familiar Oxford luncheon-table, groaning under the time-honoured summer fare, the books, the engravings,

and the sunny, irregular quadrangle outside, with its rich adornings of green, and threw herself down at last on to the low window-seat with a sigh of satisfaction.

'How quiet you are! how peaceful! how delightful it must be to live here! It seems as if one were in another world from London. Tell me what that building is over there; it's too new, it ought to be old and gray like the colleges we saw coming up here. Is everybody gone away—"gone down" you say? I should like to see all the learned people walking about for once.'

'I could show you a good many if there were time,' said young Sartoris, hardly knowing however what he was saying, so lost was he in admiration of that marvellous changing face. 'The vacation is the time they show themselves; it's like owls coming out at night. You see, Miss Bretherton, we don't keep many of them; they're in the way in term time. But in vacation they have the colleges and the parks and the Bodleian to themselves, and you may study their ways, and their spectacles, and their umbrellas, under the most favourable conditions.'

'Oh yes,' said Miss Bretherton, with a little scorn, 'people always make fun of what they are proud of. But I mean to believe that you are *all* learned, and that everybody here works himself to death, and that Oxford is quite, quite perfect!'

'Did you hear what Miss Bretherton was saying, Mrs. Stuart?' said Forbes, when they were seated at luncheon. 'Oxford is perfect, she declares already; I don't think I quite like it: it's too hot to last.'

'Am I such a changeable creature, then?' said Miss Bretherton, smiling at him. 'Do you generally find my enthusiasms cool down?'

'You are as constant as you are kind,' said Forbes, bowing to her; 'I am only like a child who sighs to see a pleasure nearing its highest point, lest there should be nothing so good afterwards.'

'Nothing so good!' she said, 'and I have only had one little drive through the streets. Mr. Wallace, are you and Mrs. Stuart really going to forbid me sight-seeing?'

'Of course!' said Wallace emphatically. 'That's one of the fundamental rules of the

society. Our charter would be a dead letter if we let you enter a single college on your way to the river to-day.'

'The only art, my dear Isabel,' said Mrs. Stuart, 'that you will be allowed to study to-day, will be the art of conversation.'

'And a most fatiguing one, too!' exclaimed Forbes; 'it beats sight-seeing hollow. But, my dear Miss Bretherton, Kendal and I will make it up to you. We'll give you an illustrated history of Oxford on the way to Nuneham. I'll do the pictures, and he shall do the letterpress. Oh! the good times I've had up here—much better than he ever had'—nodding across at Kendal, who was listening. 'He was too proper behaved to enjoy himself; he got all the right things, all the proper first-classes and prizes, poor fellow! But, as for me, I used to scribble over my note-books all lecture-time, and amuse myself the rest of the day. And then, you see, I was up twenty years earlier than he was, and the world was not as virtuous then as it is now, by a long way.'

Kendal was interrupting, when Forbes, who was in one of his maddest moods, turned round

upon his chair to watch a figure passing along the quadrangle in front of the bay-window.

'I say, Sartoris, isn't that Camden, the tutor who was turned out of Magdalen a year or two ago for that atheistical book of his, and whom you took in, as you do all the disreputables? Ah, I knew it!

"By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes."

That's not mine, my dear Miss Bretherton; it's Shakespeare's first, Charles Lamb's afterwards. But look at him well—he's a heretic, a real, genuine heretic. Twenty years ago it would have been a thrilling sight; but now, alas! it's so common that it's not the victim but the persecutors who are the curiosity.'

'I don't know that,' said young Sartoris. 'We liberals are by no means the cocks of the walk that we were a few years ago. You see, now we have got nothing to pull against, as it were. So long as we had two or three good grievances, we could keep the party together and attract all the young men. We were Israel going up against the Philistines, who had us in their grip. But

now, things are changed; we've got our own way all round, and it's the Church party who have the grievances and the cry. It is we who are the Philistines and the oppressors in our turn, and, of course, the young men as they grow up are going into opposition.'

'And a very good thing, too!' said Forbes. 'It's the only thing that prevents Oxford becoming as dull as the rest of the world. All your picturesqueness, so to speak, has been struck out of the struggle between the two forces. The Church force is the one that has given you all your buildings and your beauty, while, as for you liberals, who will know such a lot of things that you're none the happier for knowing—well, I suppose you keep the place habitable for the plain man who doesn't want to be bullied. But it's a very good thing the other side are strong enough to keep you in order.'

The conversation flowed on vigorously—Forbes guiding it, now here, now there, while Kendal presently turned away to talk in an undertone to Mrs. Stuart, who sat next him, at the farther corner of the table from Miss Bretherton.

'Edward has told you of my escapade,' said Mrs. Stuart. 'Yes, I have put my foot in it dreadfully. I don't know how it will turn out, I am sure. She's so set upon it, and Edward is so worried. I don't know how I came to tell her. You see, I've seen so much of her lately, it slipped out when we were talking.'

'It was very natural,' said Kendal, glad to notice from Mrs. Stuart's way of attacking the subject that she knew nothing of his own share in the matter. It would have embarrassed him to be conscious of another observer. 'Oh, a hundred things may turn up; there are ways out of these things if one is determined to find them.'

Mrs. Stuart shook her head. 'She is so curiously bent upon it. She is possessed with the idea that the play will suit her better than any she has had yet. Don't you think her looking very tired? I have come to know her much better these last few weeks, and it seems absurd, but I get anxious about her. Of course, she is an enormous success, but I fancy the theatrical part of it has not been quite so great as it was at first.'

'So I hear, too,' said Kendal; 'the theatre is quite as full, but the temper of the audience a good deal flatter.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Stuart; 'and then there is that curious little sister of hers, whom you haven't seen, and who counts for a good deal. I believe that in reality she is very fond of Isabel, and very proud of her, but she's very jealous of her too, and she takes her revenge upon her sister for her beauty and her celebrity by collecting the hostile things people say about her acting, and pricking them into her every now and then, like so many pins. At first Isabel was so sure of herself and the public that she took no notice—it seemed to her only what every actress must expect. But now it is different. She is not so strong as she was when she came over, nor so happy, I think, and the criticisms tell more. She is heartily sick of the *White Lady*, and is bent upon a change, and I believe she thinks this play of Edward's is just what she wants to enable her to strengthen her hold upon the public.'

'There never was a greater delusion,' said Kendal; 'it's the last part in the world she ought

to attempt. Properly speaking, unless she puts it in, there's no posing in it, none of that graceful attitudinising she does so well. It's a long tragic part—a tremendous strain, and would take all the powers of the most accomplished art to give it variety and charm.'

'Oh, I know,' sighed Mrs. Stuart, 'I know. But what is to be done?'

Kendal shrugged his shoulders with a smile, feeling as hopeless as she did. The paleness of the beautiful face opposite indeed had touched his sympathies very keenly, and he was beginning to think the safety of Wallace's play not such a desperately important matter after all. However, there was his promise, and he must go on with it. 'But I'll be hanged,' he said to himself, 'if I come within a thousand miles of hurting her feelings. Wallace must do that for himself if he wants to.'

It had been arranged that Miss Bretherton should be allowed two breaches, and two only, of the law against sight-seeing—a walk through the schools'-quadrangle, and a drive down High Street. Mr. Sartoris, who had been an examiner

during the summer term, and had so crept into the good graces of the Clerk of the Schools, was sent off to suborn that functionary for the keys of the iron gates which on Sunday shut out the Oxford world from the sleepy precincts of the Bodleian. The old clerk was in a lax vacation mood, and the envoy returned key in hand. Mrs. Stuart and Forbes undertook the guidance of Miss Bretherton, while the others started to prepare the boats. It was a hot June day, and the gray buildings, with their cool shadows, stood out delicately against a pale blue sky dappled with white cloud. Her two guides led Miss Bretherton through the quadrangle of the schools, which, fresh as it was from the hands of the restorer, rose into the air like some dainty white piece of old-world confectionery. For the windows are set so lightly in the stone-work, and are so nearly level with the wall, that the whole great building has an unsubstantial card-board air, as if a touch might dint it.

'The doctrinaires call it a fault,' said Forbes indignantly, pointing out the feature to his companions. 'I'd like to see them build anything

nowadays with half so much imagination and charm.'

They looked enviously at the closed door of the Bodleian, they read the Latin names of the schools just freshly painted at intervals round the quadrangle, and then Forbes led them out upon the steps in front of the Radcliffe and S. Mary's, and let them take their time a little.

'How strange that there should be anything in the world,' cried Miss Bretherton, 'so beautiful all through, so all of a piece as this! I had no idea it would be half so good. Don't, don't laugh at me, Mr. Forbes. I have not seen all the beautiful things you other people have seen. Just let me rave.'

'*I* laugh at you!' said Forbes, standing back in the shadow of the archway, his fine lined face, aglow with pleasure, turned towards her. '*I*, who have got Oxford in my bones and marrow, so to speak! Why, every stone in the place is sacred to me! Poetry lives here, if she has fled from all the world besides. No, no; say what you like, it cannot be too strong for me.'

Mrs. Stuart, meanwhile, kept her head cool, admired all that she was expected to admire, and

did it well, and never forgot that the carriage was waiting for them, and that Miss Bretherton was not to be tired. It was she who took charge of the other two, piloted them safely into the fly, carried them down the High Street, sternly refused to make a stop at Magdalen, and finally landed them in triumph to the minute at the great gate of Christchurch. Then they strolled into the quiet cathedral, delighted themselves with its irregular bizarre beauty, its unexpected turns and corners, which gave it a capricious fanciful air for all the solidity and business-like strength of its Norman framework, and as they rambled out again, Forbes made them pause over a window in the northern aisle—a window by some Flemish artist of the fifteenth century, who seems to have embodied in it at once all his knowledge and all his dreams. In front sat Jonah under his golden-tinted gourd—an ill-tempered Flemish peasant—while behind him the indented roofs of the Flemish town climbed the whole height of the background. It was probably the artist's native town; some roof among those carefully-outlined gables sheltered his own household

Lares. But the hill on which the town stood, and the mountainous background and the purple sea, were the hills and the sea not of Belgium, but of a dream country—of Italy, perhaps, the mediæval artist's paradise.

'Happy man!' said Forbes, turning to Miss Bretherton; 'look, he put it together four centuries ago, all he knew and all he dreamt of. And there it is to this day, and beyond the spirit of that window there is no getting. For all our work, if we do it honestly, is a compound of what we know and what we dream.'

Miss Bretherton looked at him curiously. It was as though for the first time she connected the man himself with his reputation and his pictures, that the great artist in him was more than a name to her. She listened to him sympathetically, and looked at the window closely, as though trying to follow all he had been saying. But it struck Mrs. Stuart that there was often a bewilderment in her manner which had been strange to it on her first entrance into London. Those strong emphatic ways Kendal had first noticed in her were less frequent. Sometimes

she struck Mrs. Stuart as having the air of a half-blindfold person trying to find her way along strange roads.

They passed out into the cool and darkness of the cloisters, and through the new buildings, and soon they were in the Broad Walk, trees as old as the Commonwealth bending overhead, and in front the dazzling green of the June meadows, the shining river in the distance, and the sweep of cloud-flecked blue arching in the whole.

The gentlemen were waiting for them, metamorphosed in boating-clothes, and the two boats were ready. A knot of idlers and lookers-on watched the embarkation, for on Sunday the river is forsaken, and they were the only adventurers on its blue expanse. Off they pushed, Miss Bretherton, Kendal, Mr. Stuart, and Forbes in one boat, the remaining members of the party in the other. Isabel Bretherton had thrown off the wrap which she always carried with her, and which she had gathered round her in the cathedral, and it lay about her in green fur-edged folds, bringing her white dress into relief, the shapely fall of the shoulders and all

the round slimness of her form. As Kendal took the stroke oar, after he had arranged everything for her comfort, he asked her if Oxford was what she had expected.

'A thousand times better!' she said eagerly.

'You have a wonderful power of enjoyment. One would think your London life would have spoilt it a little.'

'I don't think anything ever could. I was always laughed at for it as a child. I enjoy everything.'

'Including such a day as you had yesterday? How *can* you play the *White Lady* twice in one day? It's enough to wear you out.'

'Oh, everybody does it. I was bound to give a *matinée* to the profession some time, and yesterday had been fixed for it for ages. But I have only given three *matinées* altogether, and I shan't give another before my time is up.'

'That's a good hearing,' said Kendal. 'Do you get tired of the *White Lady*?'

'Yes,' she said emphatically; 'I am sick of her. But,' she added, bending forward with her hands clasped on her knee, so that what she said could

be heard by Kendal only; 'have you heard, I wonder, what I have in my head for the autumn? Oh well, we must not talk of it now; I have no right to make it public yet. But I should like to tell you when we get to Nuneham, if there's an opportunity.'

'We will make one,' said Kendal, with an inward qualm. And she fell back again with a nod and a smile.

On they passed, in the blazing sunshine, through Iffley lock and under the green hill crowned with Iffley village and its Norman church. The hay was out in the fields, and the air was full of it. Children, in tidy Sunday frocks, ran along the towing-path to look at them; a reflected heaven smiled upon them from the river depths; wild rose-bushes overhung the water, and here and there stray poplars rose like land-marks into the sky. The heat, after a time, deadened conversation. Forbes every now and then would break out with some comment on the moving landscape, which showed the delicacy and truth of his painter's sense, or set the boat alive with laughter by some story of the unregenerate

Oxford of his own undergraduate days; but there were long stretches of silence when, except to the rowers, the world seemed asleep, and the regular fall of the oars like the pulsing of a hot dream.

It was past five before they steered into the shadow of Nuneham woods. The meadows just ahead were a golden blaze of light, but here the shade lay deep and green on the still water, spanned by a rustic bridge, and broken every now and then by the stately whiteness of the swans. Rich steeply-rising woods shut in the left-hand bank, and foliage, grass, and wild flowers seemed suddenly to have sprung into a fuller luxuriance than elsewhere.

'It's too early for tea,' said Mrs. Stuart's clear little voice on the bank; 'at least, if we have it directly it will leave such a long time before the train starts. Wouldn't a stroll be pleasant first?'

Isabel Bretherton and Kendal only waited for the general assent before they wandered off ahead of the others. 'I should like very much to have a word with you,' she had said to him as he handed her out of the boat. And now, here they were, and, as Kendal felt, the critical moment was come.

'I only wanted to tell you,' she said, as they paused in the heart of the wood, a little out of breath after a bit of steep ascent, 'that I have got hold of a play for next October that I think you are rather specially interested in—at least, Mr. Wallace told me you had heard it all, and given him advice about it while he was writing it. I want so much to hear your ideas about it. It always seems to me that you have thought more about the stage and seen more acting than any one else I know, and I care for your opinion very much indeed—do tell me, if you will, what you thought of *Elvira!*'

'Well,' said Kendal quietly, as he made her give up her wrap to him to carry, 'there is a great deal that's fine in it. The original sketch, as the Italian author left it, was good, and Wallace has enormously improved upon it. Only——'

'Isn't it most dramatic?' she exclaimed, interrupting him; 'there are so many strong situations in it, and though one might think the subject a little unpleasant if one only heard it described, yet there is nothing in the treatment but what is noble and tragic. I have very seldom

felt so stirred by anything. I find myself planning the scenes, thinking over them this way and that incessantly.'

'It is very good and friendly of you,' said Kendal warmly, 'to wish me to give you advice about it. Do you really want me to speak my full mind?'

'Of course I do,' she said eagerly; 'of course I do. I think there are one or two points in it that might be changed. I shall press Mr. Wallace to make a few alterations. I wonder what were the changes that occurred to you?'

'I wasn't thinking of changes,' said Kendal, not venturing to look at her as she walked beside him, her white dress trailing over the moss-grown path, and her large hat falling back from the brilliant flushed cheeks and queenly throat. 'I was thinking of the play itself, of how the part would really suit you.'

'Oh, I have no doubts at all about that,' she said, but with a quick look at him; 'I always feel at once when a part will suit me, and I have fallen in love with this one. It is tragic and passionate, like the *White Lady*, but it is quite a

different phase of passion. I am tired of scolding and declaiming. *Elvira* will give me an opportunity of showing what I can do with something soft and pathetic. I have had such difficulties in deciding upon a play to begin my October season with, and now this seems to me exactly what I want. People prefer me always in something poetical and romantic, and this is new, and the mounting of it might be quite original.'

'And yet I doubt,' said Kendal; 'I think the part of Elvira wants variety, and would it not be well for you to have more of a change? Something with more relief in it, something which would give your lighter vein, which comes in so well in the *White Lady*, more chance?'

She frowned a little and shook her head. 'My turn is not that way. I can play a comedy part, of course—every actor ought to be able to—but I don't feel at home in it, and it never gives me pleasure to act.'

'I don't mean a pure light-comedy part, naturally, but something which would be less of a continuous tragic strain than this. Why, almost all the modern tragic plays have their passages of

relief, but the texture of *Elvira* is so much the same throughout,—I cannot conceive a greater demand on any one. And then you must consider your company. Frankly, I cannot imagine a part less suited to Mr. Hawes than Macias; and his difficulties would react on you.'

'I can choose whom I like,' she said abruptly; 'I am not bound to Mr. Hawes.'

'Besides,' he said cautiously, changing his ground a little, 'I should have said—only, of course, you must know much better—that it is a little risky to give the British public such very serious fare as this, and immediately after the *White Lady*. The English theatre-goer never seems to me to take kindly to mediævalism—kings and knights and nobles and the fifteenth century are very likely to bore him. Not that I mean to imply for a moment that the play would be a failure in point of popularity. You have got such a hold that you could carry anything through; but I am inclined to think that in *Elvira* you would be rather fighting against wind and tide, and that, as I said before, it would be a great strain upon you.'

The public makes no objection to Madame Desforêts in Victor Hugo,' she answered quickly, even sharply. 'Her parts, so far as I know anything about them, are just these romantic parts, and she has made her enormous reputation out of them.'

Kendal hesitated. 'The French have a great tradition of them,' he said. 'Racine, after all, was a preparation for Victor Hugo.'

'No, no!' she exclaimed, with sudden bitterness and a change of voice which startled him; 'it is not that. It is that I am I, and Madame Desforêts is Madame Desforêts. Oh, I see! I see very well that your mind is against it. And Mr. Wallace—there were two or three things in his manner which have puzzled me. He has never said yes to my proposal formally. I understand perfectly what it means; you think that I shall do the play an injury by acting it; that it is too good for me!'

Kendal felt as if a thunderbolt had fallen; the sombre passion of her manner affected him indescribably.

'Miss Bretherton!' he cried.

'Yes, yes!' she said, almost fiercely, stopping in the path. 'It's that, I know. I have felt it almost since your first word. What power have I, if not tragic power? If a part like Elvira does not suit me, what does suit me? Of course, that is what you mean. If I cannot act Elvira, I am good for nothing—I am worse than good for nothing—I am an impostor, a sham!'

She sat down on the raised edge of the bank, for she was trembling, and clasped her quivering hands on her knees. Kendal was beside himself with distress. How had he blundered so, and what had brought this about? It was so unexpected, it was incredible.

'Do—do believe me!' he exclaimed, bending over her. 'I never meant anything the least disrespectful to you; I never dreamt of it. You asked me to give you my true opinion, and my criticism applied much more to the play than to yourself. Think nothing of it, if you yourself are persuaded. You must know much better than I can what will suit you. And as for Wallace—Wallace will be proud to let you do what you will with his play.'

It seemed to him that he would have said anything in the world to soothe her. It was so piteous, so intolerable to him to watch that quivering lip.

'Ah, yes,' she said, looking up, a dreary smile flitting over her face, 'I know you didn't mean to wound me; but it was there, your feeling; I saw it at once. I might have seen it, if I hadn't been a fool, in Mr. Wallace's manner. I did see it. It's only what every one whose opinion is worth having is beginning to say. My acting has been a nightmare to me lately. I believe it has all been a great, great mistake.'

Kendal never felt a keener hatred of the conventions which rule the relations between men and women. Could he only simply have expressed his own feeling, he would have knelt beside her on the path, have taken the trembling hands in his own, and comforted her as a woman would have done. But as it was, he could only stand stiff and awkward before her, and yet it seemed to him as if the whole world had resolved itself into his own individuality and hers, and as if the gay river party and the bright friendly

relations of an hour before were separated from the present by an impassable gulf. And, worst of all, there seemed to be a strange perversity in his speech—a fate which drove him into betraying every here and there his own real standpoint whether he would or no.

'You must not say such things,' he said, as calmly as he could. 'You have charmed the English public as no one else has ever charmed it. Is not that a great thing to have done? And if I, who am very fastidious and very captious, and over-critical in a hundred ways—if I am inclined to think that a part is rather more than you, with your short dramatic experience, can compass quite successfully, why, what does it matter? I may be quite wrong. Don't take any notice of my opinion: forget it, and let me help you, if I can, by talking over the play.'

She shook her head with a bitter little smile. 'No, no; I shall never forget it. Your attitude only brought home to me, almost more strongly than I could bear, what I have suspected a long, long time—the *contempt* which people like you and Mr. Wallace feel for me!'

'Contempt!' cried Kendal, beside himself, and feeling as if all the criticisms he had allowed himself to make of her were recoiling in one avenging mass upon his head. 'I never felt anything but the warmest admiration for your courage, your work, your womanly goodness and sweetness.'

'Yes,' she said, rising and holding out her hand half-unconsciously for her cloak, which she put round her as though the wood had suddenly grown cold; 'admiration for me as a woman, contempt for me as an artist! There's the whole bare truth. Does it hold my future in it, I wonder? Is there nothing in me but this beauty that people talk of, and which I sometimes *hate*?'

She swept her hair back from her forehead with a fierce dramatic gesture. It was as though the self in her was rising up and asserting itself against the judgment which had been passed upon it, as if some hidden force hardly suspected even by herself were beating against its bars. Kendal watched her in helpless silence. 'Tell me,' she said, fixing her deep hazel eyes upon him, 'you owe it me—you have given me so

much pain. No, no; you did not mean it. But tell me, and tell me from the bottom of your heart—that is, if you are interested enough in me—what is it I want? What is it that seems to be threatening me with failure as an artist? I work all day long, my work is never out of my head; it seems to pursue me all night. But the more I struggle with it the less successful I seem even to myself.'

Her look was haunting: there was despair and there was hope in it. It implied that she had set him up in her impulsive way as a sort of oracle who alone could help her out of her difficulty. In presence of that look his own conventionality fell away from him, and he spoke the plain, direct truth to her.

'What you want,' he said slowly, as if the words were forced from him, 'is *knowledge!* London has taught you much, and that is why you are dissatisfied with your work—it is the beginning of all real success. But you want positive knowledge—the knowledge you could get from books, and the knowledge other people could teach you. You want a true sense of what has

been done and what can be done with your art, and you want an insight into the world of ideas lying round it and about it. You are very young, and you have had to train yourself. But every human art nowadays is so complicated that none of us can get on without using the great stores of experience others have laid up for us.'

It was all out now. He had spoken his inmost mind. They had stopped again, and she was looking at him intently; it struck him that he could not possibly have said what he had been saying unless he had been led on by an instinctive dependence upon a great magnanimity of nature in her. And then the next moment the strange opposites the matter held in it flashed across him. He saw the crowded theatre, the white figure on the stage, his ear seemed to be full of the clamour of praise with which London had been overwhelming its favourite. It was to this spoilt child of fortune that he had been playing the schoolmaster—he, one captious man of letters, against the world.

But she had not a thought of the kind, or rather, the situation presented itself to her in

exactly the contrary light. To her Kendal's words, instead of being those of a single critic, were the voice and the embodiment of a hundred converging impressions and sensations, and she felt a relief in having analysed to the full the vague trouble which had been settling upon her by this unravelling of her own feelings and his.

'I am very grateful to you,' she said steadily; 'very. It is strange, but almost when I first saw you I felt that there was something ominous in you to me. My dream, in which I have been living, has never been so perfect since, and now I think it has gone. Don't look so grieved,' she cried, inexpressibly touched by his face, 'I am glad you told me all you thought. It will be a help to me. And as for poor Elvira,' she added, trying to smile for all her extreme paleness, 'tell Mr. Wallace I give her up. I am not vexed, I am not angry. Don't you think now we had better go back to Mrs. Stuart? I should like a rest with her before we all meet again.'

She moved forward as she spoke, and it seemed to Kendal that her step was unsteady and that she was deadly white. He planted himself

before her in the descending path, and held out a hand to her to help her. She gave him her own, and he carried it impetuously to his lips.

'You are nobleness itself!' he cried, from the depths of his heart. 'I feel as if I had been the merest pedant and blunderer—the most incapable, clumsy idiot.'

She smiled, but she could not answer. And in a few more moments voices and steps could be heard approaching, and the scene was over.

CHAPTER VI.

THE Sunday party separated at Paddington on the night of the Nuneham expedition, and Wallace and Eustace Kendal walked eastward together. The journey home had been very quiet. Miss Bretherton had been forced to declare herself 'extremely tired,' and Mrs. Stuart's anxiety and sense of responsibility about her had communicated themselves to the rest of the party.

'It is the effect of my long day yesterday,' she said apologetically to Forbes, who hovered about her with those affectionate attentions which a man on the verge of old age pays with freedom to a young girl. 'It won't do to let the public see so much of me in future. But I don't want to spoil our Sunday. Talk to me, and I shall forget it.'

Wallace, who had had his eyes about him

when she and Eustace Kendal emerged from the wood in view of the rest of the party, was restless and ill at ease, but there was no getting any information, even by a gesture, from Kendal, who sat in his corner diligently watching the moonlight on the flying fields, or making every now and then some disjointed attempts at conversation with Mrs. Stuart.

At the station Miss Bretherton's carriage was waiting; the party of gentlemen saw her and Mrs. Stuart, who insisted on taking her home, into it; the pale, smiling face bent forward; she waved her hand in response to the lifted hats, and she was gone.

'Well?' said Wallace, with a world of inquiry in his voice, as he and Kendal turned eastward.

'It has been an unfortunate business,' said Kendal abruptly. 'I never did a thing worse, I think, or spent a more painful half-hour.'

Wallace's face fell. 'I wish I hadn't bored you with my confounded affairs,' he exclaimed. 'It was too bad!'

Kendal was inclined to agree inwardly, for he was in a state of irritable reaction; but he had

the justice to add aloud, 'It was I who was the fool to undertake it. And I think, indeed, it could have been done, but that circumstances, which neither you nor I had weighed sufficiently, were against it. She is in a nervous, shaken state, mentally and physically, and before I had had time to discuss the point at all, she had carried it on to the personal ground, and the thing was up.'

'She is deeply offended, then?'

'Not at all, in the ordinary sense; she is too fine a creature; but she talked of the "contempt" that you and I feel for her!'

'Good heavens!' cried Wallace, feeling most unjustly persuaded that his friend had bungled the matter horribly.

'Yes,' said Kendal deliberately; "contempt," that was it. I don't know how it came about. All I know is, that what I said, which seemed to me very harmless, was like a match to a mine. But she told me to tell you that she made no further claim on *Elvira*. So the play is safe.'

'D—— the play!' cried Wallace vigorously, a sentiment to which perhaps Kendal's silence

gave consent. 'But I cannot let it rest there. I must write to her.'

'I don't think I would, if I were you,' said Kendal. 'I should let it alone. She looks upon the matter as finished. She told me particularly to tell you that she was *not* vexed, and you may be quite sure that she isn't, in any vulgar sense. Perhaps that makes it all the worse. However, you've a right to know what happened, so I'll tell you, as far as I remember.'

He gave an abridged account of the conversation, which made matters a little clearer, though by no means less uncomfortable, to Wallace. When it was over, they were nearing Vigo Street, the point at which their routes diverged, Wallace having rooms in the Albany, and Kendal hailed a hansom.

'If I were you,' he said, as it came up, 'I should, as I said before, let the thing alone as much as possible. She will probably speak to you about it, and you will, of course, say what you like, but I'm pretty sure she won't take up the play again, and if she feels a coolness towards anybody, it won't be towards you.'

'There's small consolation in that!' exclaimed Wallace.

'Anyhow, make the best of it, my dear fellow,' said Kendal, as though determined to strike a lighter key. 'Don't be so dismal, things will look differently to-morrow morning—they generally do—there's no tremendous harm done. I'm sorry I didn't do your bidding better. Honestly, when I come to think over it, I don't see how I could have done otherwise. But I don't expect you to think so.'

Wallace laughed, protested, and they parted.

A few moments later Kendal let himself into his rooms, where lights were burning, and threw himself into his reading-chair, beside which his books and papers stood ready to his hand. Generally, nothing gave him a greater sense of *bien-être* than this nightly return, after a day spent in society, to these silent and faithful companions of his life. He was accustomed to feel the atmosphere of his room when he came back to it charged with welcome. It was as though the thoughts and schemes he had left warm and safe in shelter there started to life again after a

day's torpor, and thronged to meet him. His books smiled at him with friendly faces, the open page called to him to resume the work of the morning—he was, in every sense, at home. To-night, however, the familiar spell seemed to have lost its force. After a hasty supper he took up some proofs, pen in hand. But the first page was hardly turned before they had dropped on to his knee. It seemed to him as if he still felt on his arm the folds of a green, fur-edged cloak, as if the touch of a soft cold hand were still lingering in his. Presently he fell to recalling every detail of the afternoon scene,—the arching beech trees, the rich red and brown of the earth beneath, tinged with the winter sheddings of the trees, the little raised bank, her eyes as she looked up at him, the soft wisps of her golden brown hair under her hat. What superb, unapproachable beauty it was! how living, how rich in content and expression!

'Am I in love with Isabel Bretherton?' he asked himself at last, lying back on his chair with his eyes on the portrait of his sister. 'Perhaps Marie could tell me—I don't understand myself.

I don't think so. And if I were, I am not a youngster, and my life is a tolerably full one. I could hold myself in and trample it down if it were best to do so. I can hardly imagine myself absorbed in a great passion. My bachelor life is a good many years old—my habits won't break up easily. And, supposing I felt the beginnings of it, I could stop it if reason were against it.'

He left his chair, and began to pace up and down the room, thinking. 'And there is absolutely no sort of reason in my letting myself fall in love with Isabel Bretherton! She has never given me the smallest right to think that she takes any more interest in me than she does in hundreds of people whom she meets on friendly terms, unless it may be an intellectual interest, as Wallace imagines, and that's a poor sort of stepping-stone to love! And if it were ever possible that she should, this afternoon has taken away the possibility. For, however magnanimous a woman may be, a thing like that rankles: it can't help it. She will feel the sting of it worse to-morrow than to-day, and, though she will tell herself that she bears no grudge, it will leave a

gulf between us. For, of course, she must go on acting, and, whatever depressions she may have, she must believe in herself; no one can go on working without it, and I shall always recall to her something harsh and humiliating!

'Supposing, by any chance, it were not so—supposing I were able to gather up my relation with her again and make it a really friendly one—I should take, I think, a very definite line; I should make up my mind to be of use to her. After all, it is true what she says: there are many things in me that might be helpful to her, and everything there was she should have the benefit of. I would make a serious purpose of it. She should find me a friend worth having.'

His thoughts wandered on a while in this direction. It was pleasant to see himself in the future as Miss Bretherton's philosopher and friend, but in the end the sense of reality gained upon his dreams. 'I am a fool!' he said to himself resolutely at last, 'and I may as well go to bed and put her out of my mind. The chance is over—gone—done with, if it ever existed.'

The next morning, on coming down to break-

fast, he saw among his letters a handwriting which startled him. Where had he seen it before? In Wallace's hand three days ago? He opened it, and found the following note:—

'My dear Mr. Kendal—You know, I think, that I am off next week—on Monday, if all goes well. We go to Switzerland for a while, and then to Venice, which people tell me is often very pleasant in August. We shall be there by the first week in August, and Mr. Wallace tells me he hears from you that your sister, Madame de Châteauvieux, will be there about the same time. I forgot to ask you yesterday, but, if you think she would not object to it, would you give me a little note introducing me to her? All that I have heard of her makes me very anxious to know her, and she would not find me a troublesome person! We shall hardly, I suppose, meet again before I start. If not, please remember that my friends can always find me on Sunday afternoon. —Yours very truly, 'Isabel Bretherton.'

Kendal's hand closed tightly over the note. Then he put it carefully back into its envelope, and walked away with his hands behind him and the note in them, to stare out of window at the red roofs opposite.

'That is like her,' he murmured to himself; 'I wound and hurt her: she guesses I shall suffer

for it, and, by way of setting up the friendly bond again, next day, without a word, she asks me to do her a kindness! Could anything be more delicate, more gracious!'

Kendal never had greater difficulty in fixing his thoughts to his work than that morning, and at last, in despair, he pushed his book aside, and wrote an answer to Miss Bretherton, and, when that was accomplished, a long letter to his sister. The first took him longer than its brevity seemed to justify. It contained no reference to anything but her request. He felt a compulsion upon him to treat the situation exactly as she had done, but, given this limitation, how much cordiality and respect could two sides of letterpaper be made to carry with due regard to decorum and grammar?

When he next met Wallace, that hopeful, bright-tempered person had entirely recovered his cheerfulness. Miss Bretherton, he reported, had attacked the subject of *Elvira* with him, but so lightly that he had no opportunity for saying any of the skilful things he had prepared.

'She evidently did not want the question seriously opened,' he said, 'so I followed your

advice and let it alone, and since then she has been charming both to Agnes and me. I feel myself as much of a brute as ever, but I see that the only thing I can do is to hold my tongue about it.' To which Kendal heartily agreed.

A few days afterwards the newspapers gave a prominent place to reports of Miss Bretherton's farewell performance. It had been a great social event. Half the distinguished people in London were present, led by royalty. London, in fact, could hardly bear to part with its favourite, and compliments, flowers, and farewells showered upon her. Kendal, who had not meant to go at the time when tickets were to be had, tried about the middle of the week after the Oxford Sunday to get a seat, but found it utterly impossible. He might have managed it by applying to her through Edward Wallace, but that he was unwilling to do, for various reasons. He told himself that, after all, it was better to let her little note and his answer close his relations with her for the present. Everywhere else but in the theatre she might still regard him as her friend; but there they could not but be

antagonistic in some degree one to another, and not even intellectually did Kendal wish just now to meet her on a footing of antagonism.

So, when Saturday night came, he passed the hours of Miss Bretherton's triumph at a ministerial evening party, where it seemed to him that the air was full of her name and that half the guests were there as a *pis-aller*, because the *Calliope* could not receive them. And yet he thought he noticed in the common talk about her that criticism of her as an actress was a good deal more general than it had been at the beginning of the season. The little knot of persons with an opinion and reasons for it had gradually influenced the larger public. Nevertheless, there was no abatement whatever of the popular desire to see her, whether on the stage or in society. The *engouement* for her personally, for her beauty, and her fresh pure womanliness, showed no signs of yielding, and would hold out, Kendal thought, for some time, against a much stronger current of depreciation on the intellectual side than had as yet set in.

He laid down the Monday paper with a smile

of self-scorn and muttered: 'I should like to know how much she remembers by this time of the prig who lectured to her in Nuneham woods a week ago!' In the evening his *Pall Mall Gazette* told him that Miss Bretherton had crossed the channel that morning, *en route* for Paris and Venice. He fell to calculating the weeks which must elapse before his sister would be in Venice, and before he could hear of any meeting between her and the Bretherton party, and wound up his calculations by deciding that London was already hot and would soon be empty, and that, as soon as he could gather together certain books he was in want of, he would carry them and his proofs down into Surrey, refuse all invitations to country houses, and devote himself to his work.

Before he left he paid a farewell call to Mrs. Stuart, who gave him full and enthusiastic accounts of Isabel Bretherton's last night, and informed him that her brother talked of following the Brethertons to Venice some time in August.

'Albert,' she said, speaking of her husband, 'declares that he cannot get away for more than three weeks, and that he must have some walk-

ing; so that, what we propose at present is to pick up Edward at Venice at the end of August, and move up all together into the mountains afterwards. Oh, Mr. Kendal,' she went on a little nervously, as if not quite knowing whether to attack the subject or not, 'it *was* devoted of you to throw yourself into the breach for Edward as you did at Oxford. I am afraid it must have been very disagreeable, both to you and to her. When Edward told me of it next morning it made me cold to think of it. I made up my mind that our friendship—yours and ours—with her was over. But do you know she came to call on me that very afternoon—how she made time I don't know—but she did. Naturally, I was very uncomfortable, but she began to talk of it in the calmest way while we were having tea. "Mr. Kendal was probably quite right," she said, "in thinking the part unsuited to me; anyhow, I asked him for his opinion, and I should be a poor creature to mind his giving it." And then she laughed and said that I must ask Edward to keep his eyes open for anything that would do better for her in the autumn. And

since then she has behaved as if she had forgotten all about it. I never knew any one with less smallness about her.'

'No; she is a fine creature,' said Kendal, almost mechanically. How little Mrs. Stuart knew—or rather, how entirely remote she was from *feeling*—what had happened! It seemed to him that the emotion of that scene was still thrilling through all his pulses, yet to what ordinary little proportions had it been reduced in Mrs. Stuart's mind! He alone had seen the veil lifted, had come close to the energetic reality of the girl's nature. That Isabel Bretherton could feel so, could look so, was known only to him—the thought had pain in it, but the keenest pleasure also.

'Do you know,' said Mrs. Stuart presently, with a touch of reproach in her voice, 'that she asked for you on the last night?'

'Did she?'

'Yes. We had just gone on to the stage to see her after the curtain had fallen. It was such a pretty sight, you ought not to have missed it. The Prince had come to say good-bye to

her, and, as we came in, she was just turning away in her long phantom dress with the white hood falling round her head, like that Romney picture—don't you remember?—of Lady Hamilton,—Mr. Forbes has drawn her in it two or three times. The stage was full of people. Mr. Forbes was there, of course, and Edward, and ourselves, and presently I heard her say to Edward, "Is Mr. Kendal here? I did not see him in the house." Edward said something about your not having been able to get a seat, which I thought clumsy of him, for, of course, we could have got some sort of place for you at the last moment. She didn't say anything, but I thought—if you won't mind my saying so, Mr. Kendal—that, considering all things, it would have been better if you had been there.'

'It seems to me,' said Kendal, with vexation in his voice, 'that there is a fate against my doing anything as I ought to do it. I thought, on the whole, it would be better not to make a fuss about it when it came to the last. You see she must look upon me to some extent as a critical,

if not a hostile, influence, and I did not wish to remind her of my existence.'

'Oh well,' said Mrs. Stuart in her cheery common-sense way, 'that evening was such an overwhelming experience that I don't suppose she could have felt any soreness towards anybody. And, do you know, she *is* improved? I don't quite know what it is, but certainly one or two of those long scenes she does more intelligently, and even the death-scene is better,—less monotonous. I sometimes think she will surprise us all yet.'

'Very likely,' said Kendal absently, not in reality believing a word of it, but it was impossible to dissent.

'I hope so,' exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, 'with all my heart. She has been very depressed often these last weeks, and certainly, on the whole, people have been harder upon her than they were at first. I am so glad that she and your sister will meet in Venice. Madame de Châteauvieux is just the friend she wants.'

Kendal walked home feeling the rankling of a fresh pin-point. She had asked for him, and he

had not been there! What must she think, apparently, but that, from a sour, morose consistency, he had refused to be a witness of her triumph!

Oh, hostile fates!

A week later Eustace was settled in the Surrey farmhouse which had sheltered the Sunday League on its first expedition. The Surrey country was in its full glory: the first purple heather was fully out, and the distant hills rose blue and vaporous across stretches of vivid crimson, broken here and there by the dim gray greens of the furze or the sharper colour of the bracken. The chorus of birds had died away, but the nests were not yet tenantless. The great sand-pit near the farmhouse was still vocal with innumerable broods of sand-martins, still enlivened by the constant skimming to and fro of the parent birds. And under Kendal's sitting-room window a pair of tomtits, which the party had watched that May Sunday, were just launching their young family on the world. One of his first walks was to that spot beyond the pond where they had made their afternoon camping-ground. The nut-hatches had

fled—fled, Kendal hoped, some time before, for the hand of the spoiler had been near their dwelling, and its fragments lay scattered on the ground. He presently learnt to notice that he never heard the sharp sound of the bird's tapping beak among the woods without a little start of recollection.

Outside his walks, his days were spent in continuous literary effort. His book was in a condition which called for all his energies, and he threw himself vigorously into it. The first weeks were taken up with a long review of Victor Hugo's prose and poetry, with a view to a final critical result. It seemed to him that there was stuff in the great Frenchman to suit all weathers and all skies. There were sombre, wind-swept days, when the stretches of brown ling not yet in flower, the hurrying clouds, and the bending trees, were in harmony with all the fierce tempestuous side of the great Romantic. There were others when the homely, tender, domestic aspect of the country formed a sort of framework and accompaniment to the simpler patriarchal elements in the books which Kendal had about him. Then, when the pages on Victor Hugo were written,

those already printed on Châteaubriand began to dissatisfy him, and he steeped himself once more in the rolling artificial harmonies, the mingled beauty and falsity of one of the most wonderful of styles, that he might draw from it its secrets and say a last just word about it.

He knew a few families in the neighbourhood, but he kept away from them, and almost his only connection with the outer world, during his first month in the country, was his correspondence with Madame de Châteauvieux, who was at Etretât with her husband. She wrote her brother very lively, characteristic accounts of the life there, filling her letters with amusing sketches of the political or artistic celebrities with whom the little Norman town swarms in the season.

After the third or fourth letter, however, Kendal began to look restlessly at the Etretât postmark, to reflect that Marie had been there a long time, and to wonder she was not already tired of such a public sort of existence as the Etretât life. The bathing scenes, and the fire-eating deputy, and the literary woman with a mission for the spread of naturalism, became very flat to him.

He was astonished that his sister was not as anxious to start for Italy as he was to hear that she had done so.

This temper of his was connected with the fact that after the first of August he began to develop a curious impatience on the subject of the daily post. At Old House Farm the post was taken as leisurely as everything else; there was no regular delivery, and Kendal generally was content to trust to the casual mercies of the butcher or baker for his letters. But, after the date mentioned, it occurred to him that his letters reached him with an abominable irregularity, and that it would do his work no harm, but, on the contrary, much good, if he took a daily constitutional in the direction of the post-office, which gave a touch of official dignity to the wasp-filled precincts of a grocer's shop in the village, some two miles off.

For some considerable number of days, however, his walks only furnished him with food for reflection on the common disproportion of means to ends in this life. His sister's persistence in sticking to the soil of France began to seem to

him extraordinary! However, at last, the monotony of the Etretât postmarks was broken by a postcard from Lyons. 'We are here for the night on some business of Paul's; to-morrow we hope to be at Turin, and two or three days later at Venice. By the way, where will the Brethertons be? I must trust to my native wits, I suppose, when I get there. She is not the sort of light to be hidden under a bushel.'

This postcard disturbed Kendal not a little, and he felt irritably that somebody had mismanaged matters. He had supposed, and indeed suggested, that Miss Bretherton should enclose his note in one of her own to his sister's Paris address, giving, at the same time, some indication of a place of meeting in Venice. But if she had not done this, it was very possible that the two women might miss each other after all. Sometimes, when he had been contemplating this possibility with disgust, he would with a great effort make himself reflect why it was that he cared about the matter so disproportionately. Why was he so deeply interested in Isabel Bretherton's movements abroad, and in the meeting which

would bring her, so to speak, once more into his own world? Why! because it was impossible, he would answer himself indignantly, not to feel a profound interest in any woman who had ever shared as much emotion with you as she had with him in those moments at Nuneham, who had received a wound at your hands, had winced under it, and still had remained gracious, and kind, and womanly! 'I should be a hard-hearted brute,' he said to himself, 'if I did not feel a very deep and peculiar interest in her—if I did not desire that Marie's friendship should abundantly make up to her for my blundering!'

Did he ever really deceive himself into imagining that this was all? It is difficult to say. The mind of a man no longer young, and trained in all the subtleties of thought, does not deal with an invading sentiment exactly as a youth would do with all his experience to come. It steals upon him more slowly, he is capable of disguising it to himself longer, of escaping from it into other interests. Passion is in its ultimate essence the same, wherever it appears and under whatever conditions, but it possesses itself of

human life in different ways. Slowly, and certainly, the old primeval fire, the commonest, fatalest, divinest force of life, was making its way into Kendal's nature. But it was making its way against antagonistic forces of habit, tradition, self-restraint,—it found a hundred other interests in possession;—it had a strange impersonality and timidity of nature to fight with. Kendal had been accustomed to live in other men's lives. Was he only just beginning to live his own?

But, however it was, he was at least conscious during this waiting time that life was full of some hidden savour; that his thoughts were never idle, never vacant; that, as he lay flat among the fern in his moments of rest, following the march of the clouds as they sailed divinely over the rich breadth and colour of the commons, a whole brood of images nestled at his heart, or seemed to hover in the sunny air before him,—visions of a slender form fashioned with Greek suppleness and majesty, of a soft and radiant presence, of looks all womanliness, and gestures all grace, of a smile like no other he had ever

seen for charm, of a quick impulsive gait! He followed that figure through scene after scene; he saw primroses in its hand, and the pale spring blue above it; he recalled it standing tense and still with blanched cheek and fixed appealing eye, while all round the June woods murmured in the breeze; he surrounded it in imagination with the pomp and circumstance of the stage, and realised it as a centre of emotion to thousands. And then from memories he would pass on to speculations, from the scenes he knew to those he could only guess at, from the life of which he had seen a little to the larger and unexplored life beyond.

And so the days went on, and though he was impatient and restless, yet indoors his work was congenial to him, and out of doors the sun was bright, and all the while a certain little god lay hidden, speaking no articulate word, but waiting with a mischievous patience for the final overthrow of one more poor mortal.

At last the old postmistress, whom he had almost come to regard as cherishing a personal grudge against him, ceased to repulse him, and, after his

seven years of famine, the years of abundance set in. For the space of three weeks letters from Venice lay waiting for him almost every alternate morning, and the heathery slopes between the farm and the village grew familiar with the spectacle of a tall thin man in a rough tweed suit struggling, as he walked, with sheets of foreign paper which the wind was doing its best to filch away from him.

The following extracts from these letters contain such portions of them as are necessary to our subject:—

'CASA MINGHETTI 2, GRAND CANAL,
'VENICE, *August* 6.

'MY DEAR EUSTACE—I can only write you a very scrappy letter to-day, for we are just settling into our apartment, and the rooms are strewn in the most distracting way with boxes, books, and garments; while my maid, Félicie, and the old Italian woman, Caterina, who is to cook and manage for us, seem to be able to do nothing—not even to put a chair straight, or order some bread to keep us from starving—without consulting me. Paul, taking advantage of a husband's

prerogative, has gone off to *flâner* on the Piazza, while his women-folk make life tolerable at home; which is a very unfair and spiteful version of his proceedings, for he has really gone as much on my business as on his own. I sent him—feeling his look of misery, as he sat on a packing-case in the middle of this chaos, terribly on my mind—to see if he could find the English consul (whom he knows a little), and discover from him, if possible, where your friends are. It is strange, as you say, that Miss Bretherton should not have written to me; but I incline to put it down to our old Jacques at home, who is getting more and more imbecile with the weight of years and infirmities, and is quite capable of forwarding to us all the letters which are not worth posting, and leaving all the important ones piled up in the hall to await our return. It is provoking, for, if the Bretherton party are not going to stay long in Venice, we may easily spend all our time in looking for each other; which will, indeed, be a lame and impotent conclusion. However, I have hopes of Paul's cleverness.

'And now, four o'clock! There is no help for

it, my dear Eustace. I must go and instruct Caterina how not to poison us in our dinner to-night. She looks a dear old soul, but totally innocent of anything but Italian barbarities in the way of cooking. And Félicie also is well-meaning but ignorant, so, unless I wish to have Paul on my hands for a week, I must be off. This rough picnicking life, in Venice of all places, is a curious little experience; but I made up my mind last time we were here that we would venture our precious selves in no more hotels. The heat, the mosquitoes, the horrors of the food, were too much. Here we have a garden, a kitchen, a cool sitting-room; and if I choose to feed Paul on *tisane* and milk-puddings, who is to prevent me?

'. . . Paul has just come in, with victory written on his brow. The English consul was of no use; but, as he was strolling home, he went into St. Mark's, and there, of course, found them! In the church were apparently all the English people who have as yet ventured to Venice; and these, or most of them, seemed to be following in the wake of a little party of four

persons—two ladies, a gentleman, and a lame girl walking with a crutch. An excited English tourist condescended to inform Paul that it was "the great English actress, Miss Bretherton," who was creating all the commotion. Then, of course, he went up to her—he was provoked that he could hardly see her in the dim light of St. Mark's—introduced himself, and described our perplexities. Of course, she had written. I expected as much. Jacques must certainly be pensioned off! Paul thought the other three very inferior to her, though the uncle was civil, and talked condescendingly of Venice as though it were even good enough to be admired by a Worrall. It is arranged that the beauty is to come and see me to-morrow if, after Caterina has operated upon us during two meals, we are still alive. Good-night, and good-bye.'

'VENICE, *August* 7.

'Well, I have seen her! It has been a blazing day. I was sitting in the little garden which separates one half of our rooms from the other, while Catarina was arranging the *déjeûner* under

the little acacia arbour in the centre of it. Suddenly Félicie came out from the house, and behind her a tall figure in a large hat and a white dress. The figure held out both hands to me in a cordial, un-English way, and said a number of pleasant things, rapidly, in a delicious voice; while I, with the dazzle of the sun in my eyes so that I could hardly make out the features, stood feeling a little thrilled by the advent of so famous a person. In a few moments, however, as it seemed to me, we were sitting under the acacias, she was helping me to cut up the melon and arrange the figs, as if we had known one another for months, and I was experiencing one of those sudden rushes of liking which, as you know, are a weakness of mine. She stayed and took her meal with us. Paul, of course, was fascinated, and for once has not set her down as a *réputation surfaite*.

'Her beauty has a curious air of the place; and now I remember that her mother was Italian—Venetian actually, was it not? That accounts for it; she is the Venetian type spiritualised. At the foundation of her face, as it were, lies the face

of the Burano lace-maker; only the original type has been so refined, so chiselled and smoothed away, that, to speak fancifully, only a beautiful ghost of it remains. That large stateliness of her movement, too, is Italian. You may see it in any Venetian street, and Veronese has fixed it in art.

'While we were sitting in the garden who should be announced but Edward Wallace? I knew, of course, from you that he might be here about this time, but in the hurry of our settling in I had quite forgotten his existence, so that the sight of his trim person bearing down upon us was a surprise. He and the Bretherton party, however, had been going about together for several days, so that he and she had plenty of gossip in common. Miss Bretherton's enthusiasm about Venice is of a very naïve, hot, outspoken kind. It seems to me that she is a very susceptible creature. She lives her life fast, and crowds into it a greater number of sensations than most people. All this zest and pleasure must consume a vast amount of nervous force, but it makes her very refreshing to people as *blasés* as Paul and I are. My first feeling about her is very much

what yours was. Personally, there seems to be all the stuff in her of which an actress is made; will she some day stumble upon the discovery of how to bring her own individual flame and force to bear upon her art? I should think it not unlikely, and, altogether, I feel as though I should take a more hopeful view of her intellectually than you do. You see, my dear Eustace, you men never realise how clever we women are, how fast we learn, and how quickly we catch up hints from all quarters under heaven and improve upon them. An actress so young and so sympathetic as Isabel Bretherton must still be very much of an unknown quantity dramatically. I know you think that the want of training is fatal, and that popularity will stereotype her faults. It may be so; but I am inclined to think, from my first sight of her, that she is a nature that will gather from life rather what stimulates it than what dulls and vulgarises it. Altogether, when I compare my first impressions of her with the image of her left by your letters, I feel that I have been pleasantly surprised. Only in the matter of intelligence. Otherwise it has, of course, been

your descriptions of her that have planted and nurtured in me that strong sense of attraction which blossomed into liking at the moment of personal contact.'

'*August* 10.

'This afternoon we have been out in the gondola belonging to this modest establishment, with our magnificent gondolier, Piero, and his boy to convey us to the Lido. I got Miss Bretherton to talk to me about her Jamaica career. She made us all laugh with her accounts of the blood-and-thunder pieces in which the audiences at the Kingston theatre revelled. She seems generally to have played the Bandit's Daughter, the Smuggler's Wife, or the European damsel carried off by Indians, or some other thrilling clemental personage of the kind. The *White Lady* was, apparently, her first introduction to a more complicated order of play. It is extraordinary, when one comes to think of it, how little positive dramatic knowledge she must have! She knows some Shakespeare, I think—at least, she mentions two or three plays—and I gather from something she said that she is now making

the inevitable study of Juliet that every actress makes sooner or later; but Sheridan, Goldsmith, and, of course, all the French people, are mere names to her. When I think of the minute exhaustive training our Paris actors go through, and compare it with such a state of nature as hers, I am amazed at what she has done! For, after all, you know, she must be able to act to some extent; she must know a great deal more of her business than you and I suspect, or she could not get on at all.'

'*August* 16.

'It is almost a week, I see, since I wrote to you last. During that time we have seen a great deal more of Miss Bretherton, sometimes in company with her belongings, sometimes without them, and my impressions of her have ripened very fast. Oh, my dear Eustace, you have been hasty,—all the world has been hasty! Isabel Bretherton's *real* self is only now coming to the front, and it is a self which, as I say to myself with astonishment, not even your keen eyes have ever seen—hardly suspected even. Should I, myself a woman, have been as blind to a woman's

capabilities, I wonder? Very likely! These sudden rich developments of youth are often beyond all calculation.

'Mr. Wallace's attitude makes me realise more than I otherwise could the past and present condition of things. He comes and talks to me with amazement of the changes in her tone and outlook, of the girl's sharpening intellect and growing sensitiveness, and as he recalls incidents and traits of the London season—confessions or judgments or blunders of hers, and puts them beside the impression which he sees her to be making on Paul and myself—I begin to understand from his talk and his bewilderment something of the real nature of the case. Intellectually, it has been "the ugly duckling" over again. Under all the crude, unfledged imperfection of her young performance, you people who have watched her with your trained critical eyes seem to me never to have suspected the coming wings, the strange nascent power, which is only now asserting itself in the light of day.

'"What has Eustace been about?" said Paul to me last night, after we had all returned from

rambling round and round the moonlit Piazza, and he had been describing to me his talk with her. "He ought to have seen farther ahead. That creature is only just beginning to live—and it will be a life worth having! He has kindled it, too, as much as anybody. Of course we have not seen her act yet, and ignorant—yes, she is certainly ignorant,—though not so much as I imagined. But as for natural power and delicacy of mind, there can be no question at all about them!"

'"I don't know that Eustace did question them," I said; "he thought simply that she had no conception of what her art really required of her, and never would have because of her popularity."

'To which Paul replied that, as far as he could make out, nobody thought more meanly of her popularity than she did, and he has been talking a great deal to her about her season.

'"I never saw a woman at a more critical or interesting point of development," he exclaimed at last, striding up and down, and so absorbed in the subject that I could have almost laughed at

his eagerness. "Something or other, luckily for her, set her on the right track three months ago, and it is apparently a nature on which nothing is lost. One can see it in the way in which she takes Venice: there isn't a scrap of her—little as she knows about it—that isn't keen and interested and wide-awake!"

'"Well, after all," I reminded him as he was settling down to his books, "we know nothing about her as an actress."

'"We shall see," he said; "I will find out something about that too before long."'

'*August* 17-19.

'And so he has!

'Paul has been devoting himself more and more to the beauty, Mr. Wallace and I looking on with considerable amusement and interest; and this afternoon, finding it intolerable that Miss Bretherton has not even a bowing acquaintance with any of his favourite plays, Augier, Dumas, Victor Hugo, or anything else, he has been reading aloud to us in the garden, running on from scene to scene and speech to speech, translating as he went—she in rapt

attention, and he gesticulating and spouting, and, except for an occasional queer rendering that made us laugh, getting on capitally with his English. She was enchanted; the novelty and the excitement of it absorbed her; and every now and then she would stop Paul with a little imperious wave of her hand, and repeat the substance of a speech after him with an impetuous *élan*, an energy, a comprehension, which drew little nods of satisfaction out of him, and sometimes produced a strong and startling effect upon myself and Mr. Wallace. However, Mr. Wallace might stare as he liked; the two people concerned were totally unconscious of the rest of us, until at last, after the great death-scene in the *Nuit Blanche*, Paul threw down the book almost with a sob, and she, rising in a burst of feeling, held out her white arms towards an imaginary lover, and with extraordinary skill and memory repeated the substance of the heroine's last speeches:—

'"*Achille, beloved! my eyes are dim—the mists of death are gathering. O Achille! the white cottage by the river—the nest in the reeds—your face and mine in the water—the blue heaven below*

us in the stream—O joy, quick! these hands, these lips! But listen, listen! it is the cruel wind rising, rising: it chills me to the bone, it chokes, it stifles me! I cannot see the river, and the cottage is gone, and the sun. O Achille, it is dark, so dark! Gather me close, beloved!—closer, closer! O death is kind—tender, like your touch! I have no fears—none!"

'She sank back into her chair. Anything more pathetic, more noble than her intonation of those words, could not have been imagined. Desforêts herself could not have spoken them with a more simple, a more piercing tenderness. I was so confused by a multitude of conflicting feelings —my own impressions and yours, the realities of the present position and the possibilities of her future—that I forgot to applaud her. It was the first time I had had any glimpse at all of her dramatic power, and, rough and imperfect as the test was, it seemed to me enough. I have not been so devoted to the *Français*, and to some of the people connected with it, for ten years, for nothing! One gets a kind of insight from long habit which, I think, one may trust.

Oh, you blind Eustace, how could you forget that for a creature so full of primitive energy, so rich in the *stuff* of life, nothing is irreparable! Education has passed her by. Well, she will go to find her education. She will make a teacher out of every friend, out of every sensation. Incident and feeling, praise and dispraise, will all alike tend to mould the sensitive plastic material into shape. So far she may have remained outside her art; the art, no doubt, has been a conventional appendage, and little more. Training would have given her good conventions, whereas she has only picked up bad and imperfect ones. But no training could have given her what she will evidently soon develop for herself, that force and flame of imagination which fuses together instrument and idea in one great artistic whole. She has that imagination. You can see it in her responsive ways, her quick sensitive emotion. Only let it be roused and guided to a certain height, and it will overleap the barriers which have hemmed it in, and pour itself into the channels made ready for it by her art.

'There, at least, you have my strong impres-

sion. It is, in many ways, at variance with some of my most cherished principles; for both you and I are perhaps inclined to overrate the value of education, whether technical or general, in its effect on the individuality. And, of course, a better technical preparation would have saved Isabel Bretherton an immense amount of time; would have prevented her from contracting a host of bad habits—all of which she will to have unlearn. But the root of the matter is in her; of that I am sure; and whatever weight of hostile circumstance may be against her, she will, if she keeps her health—as to which I am sometimes, like you, a little anxious—break through it all and triumph.

'But if you did not understand her quite, you have enormously helped her; so much I will tell you for your comfort. She said to me yesterday abruptly—we were alone in our gondola, far out on the lagoon—"Did your brother ever tell you of a conversation he and I had in the woods at Nuneham about Mr. Wallace's play?"

'"Yes," I answered with outward boldness, but a little inward trepidation; "I have not known

anything distress him so much for a long time. He thought you had misunderstood him."

'"No," she said quietly, but as it seemed to me with an undercurrent of emotion in her voice; "I did not misunderstand him. He meant what he said, and I would have forced the truth from him, whatever happened. I was determined to make him show me what he felt. That London season was sometimes terrible to me. I seemed to myself to be living in two worlds—one a world in which there was always a sea of faces opposite to me, or crowds about me, and a praise ringing in my ears which was enough to turn anybody's head, but which after a while repelled me as if there was something humiliating in it; and then, on the other side, a little inner world of people I cared for and respected, who looked at me kindly, and thought for me, but to whom as an actress I was just of no account at all! It was your brother who first roused that sense in me; it was so strange and painful, for how could I help at first believing in all the hubbub and the applause?"

'"Poor child!" I said, reaching out my hand

for one of hers. "Did Eustace make himself disagreeable to you?"

'"It was more, I think," she answered, as if reflecting, "the standard he always seemed to carry about with him than anything connected with my own work. At least, of course, I mean before that Nuneham day. Ah, that Nuneham day! It cut deep."

'She turned away from me, and leant over the side of the boat, so that I could not see her face.

'"You forced it out of Eustace, you know," I said, trying to laugh at her, "you uncompromising young person! Of course, he flattered himself that you forgot all about his preaching the moment you got home. Men always make themselves believe what they want to believe."

'"Why should he want to believe so?" she replied quickly. "I had half foreseen it, I had forced it from him, and yet I felt it like a blow! It cost me a sleepless night, and some—well, some very bitter tears. Not that the tears were a new experience. How often, after all that noise at the theatre, have I gone home and cried myself to sleep over the impossibility of doing what I

wanted to do, of moving those hundreds of people, of making them feel, and of putting my own feeling into shape! But that night, and with my sense of illness just then, I saw myself—it seemed to me quite in the near future—grown old and ugly, a forgotten failure, without any of those memories which console people who have been great when they must give up. I felt myself struggling against such a weight of ignorance, of bad habits, of unfavourable surroundings. How was I ever to get free and to reverse that judgment of Mr. Kendal's? My very success stood in my way. How was 'Miss Bretherton' to put herself to school?"

'"But now," I said to her warmly, "you have got free; or, rather, you are on the way to freedom."

'She thought a little bit without speaking, her chin resting on her hand, her elbow on her knee. We were passing the great red-brown mass of the Armenian convent. She seemed to be drinking in the dazzling harmonies of blue and warm brown and pearly light. When she did speak again it was very slowly, as though she were trying to give words to a number of complex impressions.

'"Yes," she said; "it seems to me that I am different; but I can't tell exactly how or why. I see all sorts of new possibilities, new meanings everywhere: that is one half of it! But the other, and the greater, half is—how to make all these new feelings and any new knowledge which may come to me tell on my art." And then she changed altogether with one of those delightful swift transformations of hers, and her face rippled over with laughter. "At present the chief result of the difference, whatever it may be, seems to be to make me most unmanageable at home. I am for ever disagreeing with my people, saying I can't do this and I won't do that. I am getting to enjoy having my own way in the most abominable manner." And then she caught my hand, that was holding hers, between both her own, and said half laughing and half in earnest—

'"Did you ever realise that I don't know any single language besides my own — not even French? That I can't read any French book or any French play?"

'"Well," I said, half laughing too, "it is very

astonishing. And you know it can't go on if you are to do what I think you will do. French you positively must learn, and learn quickly. I don't mean to say that we haven't good plays and a tradition of our own; but for the moment France is the centre of your art, and you cannot remain at a distance from it! The French have organised their knowledge; it is available for all who come. Ours is still floating and amateurish——"

'And so on. You may imagine it, my dear Eustace; I spare you any more of it verbatim. After I had talked away for a long time and brought it all back to the absolute necessity that she should know French and become acquainted with French acting and French dramatic ideals, she pulled me up in the full career of eloquence, by demanding with a little practical air, a twinkle lurking somewhere in her eyes—

'"Explain to me, please; how is it to be done?"

'"Oh," I said, "nothing is easier. Do you know anything at all?"

'"Very little. I once had a term's lessons at Kingston."

'"Very well, then," I went on, enjoying this little comedy of a neglected education; "get a French maid, a French master, and a novel: I will provide you with *Consuelo* and a translation to-morrow."

'"As for the French maid," she answered dubiously, shaking her head, "I don't know. I expect my old black woman that I brought with me from Jamaica would ill-treat her—perhaps murder her. But the master can be managed and the novel. Will none of you laugh at me if you see me trailing a French grammar about?"

'And so she has actually begun to-day. She makes a pretence of keeping her novel and a little dictionary and grammar in a bag, and hides them when any one appears. But Paul has already begun to tease her about her new and mysterious occupation, and I foresee that he will presently spend the greater part of his mornings in teaching her. I never saw anybody attract him so much; she is absolutely different from anything he has seen before; and, as he says, the mixture of ignorance and genius in her—yes, genius; don't be startled!—is most stimulating to the imagination.'

'*August* 22.

'During the last few days I have not been seeing so much of Miss Bretherton as before. She has been devoting herself to her family, and Paul and I have been doing our pictures. We cannot persuade her to take any very large dose of galleries; it seems to me that her thoughts are set on one subject—and one subject only—and while she is in this first stage of intensity, it is not likely that anything else will have a chance.

'It is amusing to study the dissatisfaction of the uncle and aunt with the turn things have taken since they left London. Mr. Worrall has been evidently accustomed to direct his niece's life from top to bottom—to choose her plays for her, helped by Mr. Robinson; to advise her as to her fellow-actors, and her behaviour in society; and all, of course, with a shrewd eye to the family profit, and as little regard as need be to any fantastical conception of art.

'Now, however, Isabel has asserted herself in several unexpected ways. She has refused altogether to open her autumn season with the play which had been nearly decided on before they

left London—a flimsy spectacular performance quite unworthy of her. As soon as possible she will make important changes in the troupe who are to be with her, and at the beginning of September she is coming to stay three weeks with us in Paris, and, in all probability (though the world is to know nothing of it), Perrault of the Conservatoire, who is a great friend of ours, will give her a good deal of positive teaching. This last arrangement is particularly exasperating to Mr. Worrall. He regards it as sure to be known, a ridiculous confession of weakness on Isabel's part, and so on. However, in spite of his wrath and the aunt's sullen or tearful disapproval, she has stood firm, and matters are so arranged.'

'*Saturday night, August* 25.

'This evening we persuaded her at last to give us some scenes of Juliet. How I wish you could have been here! It was one of those experiences which remain with one as a sort of perpetual witness to the poetry which life holds in it, and may yield up to one at any moment. It was in our little garden; the moon was high above the

houses opposite, and the narrow canal running past our side railing into the Grand Canal was a shining streak of silver. The air was balmy and absolutely still; no more perfect setting to Shakespeare or to Juliet could have been imagined. Paul sat at a little table in front of the rest of us; he was to read Romeo and the Nurse in the scenes she had chosen, while in the background were the Worralls and Lucy Bretherton (the little crippled sister), Mr. Wallace, and myself. She did the balcony scene, the morning scene with Romeo, the scene with the nurse after Tybalt's death, and the scene of the philtre. There is an old sundial in the garden, which caught the moonbeams. She leaned her arms upon it, her eyes fixed upon the throbbing moonlit sky, her white brocaded dress glistening here and there in the pale light—a vision of perfect beauty. And when she began her sighing appeal—

"O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?"—

it seemed to me as if the night—the passionate Italian night — had found its voice — the only voice which fitted it.

'Afterwards I tried as much as possible to shake off the impressions peculiar to the scene itself, to think of her under the ordinary conditions of the stage, to judge her purely as an actress. In the love scenes there seemed hardly anything to find fault with. I thought I could trace in many places the influence of her constant dramatic talks and exercises with Paul. The flow of passion was continuous and electric, but marked by all the simpleness, all the sweetness, all the young winsome extravagance which belong to Juliet. The great scene with the Nurse had many fine things in it; she has evidently worked hard at it line by line, and that speech of Juliet's, with its extraordinary dramatic capabilities—

"Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?"—

was given with admirable variety and suppleness of intonation. The dreary sweetness of her

"*Banished!* that one word *banished!*"

still lives with me, and her gestures as she paced restlessly along the little strip of moonlit path. The speech before she takes the potion was the

least satisfactory of all; the ghastliness and horror of it are beyond her resources as yet; she could not infuse them with that terrible beauty which Desforêts would have given to every line. But where is the English actress that has ever yet succeeded in it?

'We were all silent for a minute after her great cry—

"Romeo, Romeo, Romeo, I drink to thee!"—

had died upon our ears. And then, while we applauded her, she came forward listlessly, her beautiful head drooping, and approached Paul like a child that has said its lesson badly.

'"I can't do it, that speech; I can't do it!"

'"It wants more work," said Paul; "you'll get it. But the rest was admirable. You must have worked very hard!"

'"So I have," she said, brightening at the warmth of his praise. "But Diderot is wrong, wrong, wrong! When I could once reach the feeling of the Tybalt speech, when I could once *hate* him for killing Tybalt in the same breath in which I *loved* him for being Romeo, all was

easy; gesture and movement came to me; I learnt them, and the thing was done."

'The reference, of course, meant that Paul had been reading to her his favourite *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, and that she had been stimulated, but not converted, by the famous contention that the actor should be the mere "cold and tranquil spectator," the imitator of other men's feelings, while possessing none of his own. He naturally would have argued, but I would not have it, and made her rest. She was quite worn out with the effort, and I do not like this excessive fatigue of hers. I often wonder whether the life she is leading is not too exciting for her. This is supposed to be her holiday, and she is really going through more brain-waste than she has ever done in her life before! Paul is throwing his whole energies into one thing only, the training of Miss Bretherton; and he is a man of forty-eight, with an immense experience, and she a girl of twenty-one, with everything to learn, and as easily excited as he is capable of exciting her. I really must keep him in check.

'Mr. Wallace, when we had sent her home

across the canal—their apartment is on the other side, farther up towards the railway station—could not say enough to me of his amazement at the change in her.

'"What have you done to her?" he asked. "I can hardly recognise the old Miss Bretherton at all. Is it really not yet four months since your brother and I went to see her in the *White Lady*? Why, you have bewitched her!"

'"We have done something, I admit," I said; "but the power you see developed in her now was roused in her when months ago she first came in contact with the new world and the new ideal which you and Eustace represented to her."

'There, my dear Eustace, have I given you your due? Oh, Miss Bretherton says so many kind things about you! I'll take especial pains to tell you some of them next time I write.'

WALLACE TO KENDAL.

'VENICE, *August* 27.

'MY DEAR KENDAL—This has been a day of events which, I believe, will interest you as much

as they did me. I told Madame de Châteauvieux that I should write to you to-night, and my letter, she says, must do in place of one from her for a day or two. We have been to Torcello to-day—your sister, M. de Châteauvieux, Miss Bretherton, and I. The expedition itself was delightful, but that I have no time to describe. I only want to tell you what happened when we got to Torcello.

'But first, you will, of course, know from your sister's letters—she tells me she writes to you twice a week—how absorbed we have all been in the artistic progress of Miss Bretherton. I myself never saw such a change, such an extraordinary development in any one. How was it that you and I did not see farther into her? I see now, as I look back upon her old self, that the new self was there in germ. But I think perhaps it may have been the vast disproportion of her celebrity to her performance that blinded us to the promise in her; it was irritation with the public that made us deliver an over-hasty verdict on her.

'However that may be, I have been making up

my mind for some days past that the embassy on behalf of *Elvira* which I thrust upon you, and which you so generously undertook, was a blunder on my part which it would be delightful to repair, and which no artistic considerations whatever need prevent me from repairing. You cannot think how divine she was in Juliet the other night. Imperfect and harsh, of course, here and there, but still a creature to build many and great hopes upon, if ever there was one. She is shaking off trick after trick; your brother-in-law is merciless to them whenever they appear, and she is for ever working with a view to his approval, and also, I think, from two or three things she has said, with a memory of that distant standard of criticism which she believes to be embodied in you!

'M. de Châteauvieux has devoted himself to her; it is a pretty sight to see them together. Your sister and she, too, are inseparable, and Madame de Châteauvieux's quiet, equable refinement makes a good contrast to Miss Bretherton's mobility. She will never lose the imprint of her friendship with these two people; it was

a happy thought which led you to bring them together.

'Well, we went to Torcello, and I watched for an opportunity of getting her alone. At last Madame de Châteauvieux gave me one; she carried off her husband, Ruskin in hand, to study the mosaics, and Miss Bretherton and I were left sitting under the outer wall of San Fosca till they should come back. We had been talking of a hundred things—not of acting at all; of the pomegranates, of which she had a scarlet mass in her lap, of the gray slumberous warmth of the day, or the ragged children who pestered us for coppers—and then suddenly, I asked her whether she would answer me a personal question: Was there any grudge in her mind towards me for anything I had said and done in London, or caused others to say and do for me?

'She was much startled, and coloured a good deal, but she said very steadily: "I feel no sort of grudge; I never had any cause." "Well, then," I went on, throwing myself down on the grass before her that I might really see her expression, "if you bear me no grudge, if you feel kindly

towards me, will you help me to undo a great mistake of mine?"

'She looked at me with parted lips and eyes which seemed to be trying to find out from my face what I meant. "Will you," I said, hurrying on; "will you take from me *Elvira*, and do what you like with it?" And then, do you know what happened? Her lips quivered, and I thought she was on the point of tears, but suddenly the nervousness of each of us seemed to strike the other, and we both laughed—she long and helplessly, as if she could not help herself.

'Presently she looked up, with her great eyes swimming in tears, and tried to impress on me that I was speaking hastily, that I had an ideal for that play she could never promise to reach, that it was my friendship for her that made me change my mind, that there might be practical difficulties now that so many arrangements had been made, and so on. But I would not listen to her. I had it all ready; I had an actor to propose to her for Macias, and even the costumes in my mind, ready to sketch for her, if need were. Forbes, I suggested, might and would direct the

setting of the piece; no one could do it with more perfect knowledge or a more exquisite taste; and for her, as we both knew, he would turn scene-painter, if necessary. And so I rambled on, soothing her shaken feeling and my own until she had let me beguile her out of her attitude of reluctance and shrinking into one at least of common interest.

'But by the time the others came back I had not got a direct consent out of her, and all the way home she was very silent. I, of course, got anxious, and began to think that my blunder had been irreparable; but, at any rate, I was determined not to let the thing linger on. So that, when the Châteauvieux asked me to stay and sup with them and her, I supped, and afterwards in the garden boldly brought it out before them all, and appealed to your sister for help. I knew that both she and her husband were acquainted with what had happened at Oxford, and I supposed that Miss Bretherton would know that they were, so that it was awkward enough. Only that women, when they please, have such tact, such an art of smoothing over and ignoring the rough

places of life, that one often with them gets through a difficult thing without realising how difficult it is. M. de Châteauvieux smoked a long time and said nothing, then he asked me a great many questions about the play, and finally gave no opinion. I was almost in despair—she said so little—until, just as I was going away with *Elvira's* fate still quite unsettled, she said to me with a smile and a warm pressure of the hand, "To-morrow come and see me, and I will tell you yes or no!"

'And to-day I have been to see her, and the night has brought good luck! For *Elvira*, my dear Kendal, will be produced on or about the 20th November, in this year of grace, and Isabel Bretherton will play the heroine, and your friend is already plunged in business, and aglow with hope and expectation. How I wish—how we all wish—that you were here! I feel more and more penitent towards you. It was you who gave the impulse of which the results are ripening, and you ought to be here with us now, playing in the body that friend's part which we all yield you so readily in spirit. "Tell Mr. Kendal," were almost

her last words to me, "that I cannot say how much I owe to his influence and his friendship. He first opened my eyes to so many things. He was so kind to me, even when he thought least of me. I hope I shall win a word of praise from him yet!" There! I trust that will rouse a little pleasant conceit in you. She meant it, and it is true. I must go off and work at many things. To-morrow or next day, after some further talk with her, I shall set off homewards, look up Forbes and begin operations. She will be in town in about three weeks from now—as you know she is going to stay first with your sister in Paris—and then we shall have hard work till about the middle of November, when I suppose the play will be produced. This will be more than a fortnight later than she intended to open, and Mr. Worrall will probably be furious over the delay, but she has developed a will of her own lately.

'*Au revoir* then. You must have had a peaceful summer with your books and your heather. I wish I had anything like the same digestion for work that you have; I never saw a man get

as much pleasure out of his books as you do. To me, I confess, that work is always work, and idleness a joy!

'However, no more idleness for me for a good while to come. How grand she will be in that last act!—Where were my eyes last spring?—I wish there were a chance of her seeing much that is interesting in Paris. However, flat as September generally is, she will get some Molière at the *Français*, and your sister will take care that she sees the right people. Perrault, I hear, is to give her lessons—under the rose. Happy man!'

Kendal read this letter on a glowing August morning as he walked homeward along the side of the pond, where the shade of the fir-trees was a welcome protection against the rising heat, and the air was fragrant with the scent of the ling, which was just out in all its first faint flush of beauty. He threw himself down among it after he had finished the sheets, and stared for long at the sunlit motionless water, his hat drawn forward over his brows. So this was the outcome of it

all. Isabel Bretherton was about to become a great actress,—Undine had found her soul!

It seemed to him, as he lay there buried in the ling, that during the past three weeks he had lived through a whole drama of feeling—a drama which had its beginning, its complications, its climax. While it had been going on he had been only half-conscious of its bearings, half-conscious of himself. Wallace's letter had made him sensible of the situation, as it concerned himself, with a decisive sharpness and completeness. There was no possibility of any further self-delusion: the last defences were overcome, the last veil between himself and the pursuing force which had overtaken him had fallen, and Kendal, with a shiver of pain, found himself looking straight into the wide, hungry eyes of Love! Oh, was this love,—this sore desire, this dumb craving, this restlessness of the whole being?

The bees hummed among the heather, every now and then a little brown-streaked lizard rustled faintly beside him, a pair of kingfishers flashed across the pond. But he saw and heard nothing, responsive as every sense in him com-

monly was to the details of the wild life about him. His own miserable reverie absorbed him. What was it that had made the charm of those early weeks in July immediately after his parting with her? What was it which had added zest to his work, and enchantment to the summer beauty of the country, and, like a hidden harmony dimly resonant within him, had kept life tuneful and delightful? He could put words to it now. It had been nothing less than a settled foresight, a deep conviction, of *Isabel Bretherton's failure!* What a treachery! But yes,—the vision perpetually before his eyes had been the vision of a dying fame, a waning celebrity, a forsaken and discrowned beauty! And from that abandonment and that failure he had dimly foreseen the rise and upspringing of new and indescribable joy. He had seen her, conscious of defeat and of the inexorable limits of her own personality, turning to the man who had read her truly and yet had loved her, surely, from the very beginning, and finding in his love a fresh glory and an all-sufficient consolation. This had been the inmost truth, the centre, the kernel of all his thought,

of all his life. He saw it now with sharp distinctness,—now that every perception was intensified by pain and longing.

Then, as he went over the past, he saw how this consciousness had been gradually invaded and broken up by his sister's letters. He remembered the incredulous impatience with which he had read the earlier ones. So, Marie thought him mistaken! 'Isabel Bretherton would be an actress yet'—'she had genius, after all'—'she was learning, growing, developing every day.' Absurd! *He* had been able to keep his critical estimate of the actress and his personal admiration of the woman separate from one another. But evidently Marie's head had been confused, misled, by her heart. And then, little by little, his incredulity had yielded, and his point of view had changed. Instead of impatience of Marie's laxity of judgment, what he had been fiercely conscious of for days was jealousy of Paul de Châteauvieux—jealousy of his opportunities, his influence, his relation towards that keen sweet nature. That, too, had been one of his dreams of the future,—the dream of tutoring and training

her young unformed intelligence. He had done something towards it; he had, as it were, touched the spring which had set free all this new and unexpected store of power. But, if he had planted, others had watered, and others would reap. In this great crisis of her fortunes he had been nothing to her. Other voices and other hands had guided and directed her. Her kindly, grateful messages only stung and tortured him. They seemed to him the merest friendly commonplace. In reality her life had passed out of his ken; her nature had flowered into a new perfection, and he had not been there to see or to help. She would never connect him with the incidents or the influences which had transformed existence to her, and would probably irrevocably change the whole outline of her future. Once he had wounded and startled her, and had despaired for awhile of undoing the impression made upon her. But now he felt no quick anxiety, no fear how things might turn, only a settled flat consciousness of division, of a life that had once been near to his swept away from him for ever, of diverging roads which no kindly fate would ever join again.

For, by the end of this time of solitary waiting, his change of attitude was complete. It was evident to him that his anticipation of her failure, potent as it had been over his life, had never been half so real, half so vivid, as this new and strange foreboding of her true success. Marie must be right. He had been a mere blind hair-splitting pedant, judging Isabel Bretherton by principles and standards which left out of count the inborn energy, the natural power of growth, of such a personality as hers. And the more he had once doubted the more he now believed. Yes, she would be great—she would make her way into that city of the mind, in which he himself had made his dwelling-place; she, too, would enter upon the world's vast inheritance of knowledge. She would become, if only her physical frame proved equal to the demands upon it, one of that little band of interpreters, of ministers of the idea, by whom the intellectual life of a society is fed and quickened. Was he so lost in his own selfish covetous need as not to rejoice?

Oh, but she was a woman, she was beautiful,

and he loved her! Do what he would, all ideal and impersonal considerations fell utterly away from him. Day by day he knew more of his own heart; day by day the philosopher grew weaker in him, and the man's claim fiercer. Before him perpetually were two figures of a most human and practical reality. He saw a great actress, absorbed in the excitement of the most stimulating of lives, her power ripening from year to year, her fame growing and widening with time; and beside this brilliant vision he saw himself, the quiet man of letters, with the enthusiasms of youth behind him, the calm of middle-age before him. What possible link could there be between them?

At last Wallace's letter cleared still further the issues of the conflict; or rather, it led to Kendal's making a fatalist compact with himself. He was weary of the struggle, and it seemed to him that he must somehow or other escape from the grip in which his life was held. He must somehow deaden this sense, this bitter sense of loss, if it were only by postponing the last renunciation. He would go back to his work and force himself

not to hate it. It was his only refuge, and he must cling to it for dear life. And he would not see her again till the night of the first performance of *Elvira*. She would be in London in a month's time, but he would take care to be out of reach. He would not meet those glorious eyes or touch that hand again till the die was cast,—upon the fate of *Elvira* he staked his own. The decision brought him a strange kind of peace, and he went back to his papers and his books like a man who has escaped from the grasp of some deadly physical ill into a period of comparative ease and relief.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a rainy November night. A soft continuous downpour was soaking the London streets, without, however, affecting their animation or the nocturnal brightness of the capital, for the brilliance of the gas-lamps was flashed back from innumerable patches of water, and every ray of light seemed to be broken by the rain into a hundred shimmering reflections. It was the hour when all the society of which an autumnal London can boast is in the streets, hurrying to its dinner or its amusements, and when the stream of diners-out, flowing through the different channels of the west, is met in all the great thoroughfares by the stream of theatre-goers setting eastward.

The western end of D—— Street was especially crowded, and so was the entrance to a certain narrow street leading northwards from it,

in which stood the new bare buildings of the *Calliope*. Outside the theatre itself there was a dense mass of carriages and human beings, only kept in order by the active vigilance of the police, and wavering to and fro with kaleidoscopic rapidity. The line of carriages seemed interminable, and, after those who emerged from them had run the gauntlet of the dripping, curious, good-tempered multitude outside, they had to face the sterner ordeal of the struggling well-dressed crowd within, surging up the double staircase of the newly-decorated theatre. The air inside was full of the hum of talk, and the whole crowd had a homogeneous, almost a family air, as though the contents of one great London *salon* had been poured into the theatre. Everybody seemed to know everybody else; there were politicians, and artists, and writers of books, known and unknown; there were fair women and wise women and great ladies; and there was that large substratum of faithful, but comparatively nameless, persons on whom a successful manager learns to depend with some confidence on any first night of importance.

And this was a first night of exceptional interest. So keen, indeed, had been the competition for tickets that many of those present had as vague and confused an idea of how they came to be among the favoured multitude pouring into the *Calliope* as a man in a street panic has of the devices by which he has struggled past the barrier which has overthrown his neighbour. Miss Bretherton's first appearance in *Elvira* had been the subject of conversation for weeks past among a far larger number of London circles than generally concern themselves with theatrical affairs. Among those which might be said to be within a certain literary and artistic circumference, people were able to give definite grounds for the public interest. The play, it was said, was an unusually good one, and the progress of the rehearsals had let loose a flood of rumours to the effect that Miss Bretherton's acting in it would be a great surprise to the public. Further, from the intellectual centre of things, it was only known that the famous beauty had returned to the scene of her triumphs; and that now, as in the season, one of the first articles of the social

decalogue laid it down as necessary that you should, first of all, see her in the theatre, and, secondly, know her—by fair means if possible, if not, by crooked ones—in society.

It was nearly a quarter to eight. The orchestra had taken their places, and almost every seat was full. In one of the dress-circle boxes sat three people who had arrived early, and had for some time employed themselves in making a study of the incoming stream through their opera-glasses. They were Eustace Kendal, his sister, Madame de Châteauvieux, and her husband. The Châteauvieux had travelled over from Paris expressly for the occasion, and Madame de Châteauvieux, her gray-blue eyes sparkling with expectation and all her small delicate features alive with interest and animation, was watching for the rising of the heavy velvet curtain with an eagerness which brought down upon her the occasional mockery of her husband, who was in reality, however, little less excited than herself. It was but three weeks since they had parted with Isabel Bretherton in Paris, and they were feeling on this first night something of the anxiety

and responsibility which parents feel when they launch a child upon whom they have expended their best efforts into a critical world.

As for Eustace, he also had but that afternoon arrived in London. He had been paying a long duty-visit to some aged relatives in the North, and had so lengthened it out, in accordance with the whim which had taken possession of him in Surrey, that he had missed all the preparations for *Elvira*, and had arrived upon the scene only at the moment when the final *coup* was to be delivered. Miss Bretherton had herself sent him a warm note of invitation, containing an order for the first night and an appeal to him to come and 'judge me as kindly as truth will let you.' And he had answered her that, whatever happened, he would be in his place in the *Calliope* on the night of the 20th of November.

And now here he was, wearing outwardly precisely the same aspect of interested expectation as those around him, and all the time conscious inwardly that to him alone, of all the human beings in that vast theatre, the experience of the evening would be so vitally and desperately im-

portant, that life on the other side of it would bear the mark of it for ever. It was a burden to him that his sister suspected nothing of his state of feeling; it would have consoled him that she should know it, but it seemed to him impossible to tell her.

'There are the Stuarts,' he said, bending down to her as the orchestra struck up, 'in the box to the left. Forbes, I suppose, will join them when it begins. I am told he has been working like a horse for this play. Every detail in it, they say, is perfect, artistically and historically, and the time of preparation has been exceptionally short. Why did she refuse to begin again with the *White Lady*, to give herself more time?'

'I cannot tell you, except that she had a repugnance to it which could not be got over. I believe her associations with the play were so painful that it would have seemed an evil omen to her to begin a new season with it.'

'Was she wise, I wonder?'

'I think she did well to follow her fancy in the matter, and she herself has had plenty of time. She was working at it all the weeks she

was with us, and young Harting, too, I think had notice enough. Some of the smaller parts may go roughly to-night, but they will soon fall into shape.'

'Poor Wallace!' said Kendal; 'he must be wishing it well over. I never saw a house better stocked with critics.'

'Here he is,' cried Madame de Châteauvieux, betraying her suppressed excitement in her nervous little start. 'Oh, Mr. Wallace, how do you do? and how are things going?'

Poor Wallace threw himself into his seat, looking the picture of misery so far as his face, which Nature had moulded in one of her cheerfullest moods, was capable of it.

'My dear Madame de Châteauvieux, I have no more notion than the man in the moon. Miss Bretherton is an angel, and without Forbes we should have collapsed a hundred times already, and that's about all I know. As for the other actors, I suppose they will get through their parts somehow, but at present I feel like a man at the foot of the gallows. There goes the bell; now for it.'

The sketch for the play of *Elvira* had been found among the papers of a young penniless Italian who had died, almost of starvation, in his Roman garret, during those teeming years after 1830, when poets grew on every hedge and the romantic passion was abroad. The sketch had appeared in a little privately-printed volume which Edward Wallace had picked up by chance on the Paris quays. He had read it in an idle hour in a railway, had seen its capabilities, and had forthwith set to work to develop the sketch into a play. But, in developing it, he had carefully preserved the character of the original conception. It was a conception strictly of the Romantic time, and the execution of it presented very little of that variety of tone which modern audiences have learnt to expect. The play told one rapid breathless story of love, jealousy, despair, and death, and it told it directly and uninterruptedly, without any lighter interludes. Author and adapter alike had trusted entirely to the tragic force of the situation and the universality of the motives appealed to. The diction of the piece was the diction of Alfred de Vigny or of the

school of Victor Hugo. It was, indeed, rather a dramatic love-poem than a play, in the modern sense, and it depended altogether for its success upon the two characters of Macias and Elvira.

In devising the character of Macias the Italian author had made use of a traditional Spanish type, which has its historical sources, and has inspired many a Spanish poet from the fifteenth century downwards. Macias is knight, poet, and lover; his love is a kind of southern madness which withers every other feeling in its neighbourhood, and his tragic death is the only natural ending to a career so fierce and uncontrolled. Elvira, with whom Macias is in love, the daughter of Nuno Fernandez, is embodied gentleness and virtue, until the fierce progress of her fate has taught her that men are treacherous and the world cruel. For her love had been prosperous and smooth until, by a series of events, it had been brought into antagonism with two opposing interests—those of her father and of a certain Fernan Perez, the tool and favourite of the powerful Duke of Villena. The ambition and selfish passion of these two men are enlisted against her. Perez

is determined to marry her; her father is determined to sweep Macias out of the path of his own political advancement. The intrigue devised between the two is perfectly successful. Macias is enticed away; Elvira, forced to believe that she is deserted and betrayed, is half driven, half entrapped, into a marriage with Perez; and Macias, returning to claim her against a hundred obstacles, meets the wedding party on their way back to the palace of the Duke.

The rest of the play represented, of course, the struggle between the contending forces thus developed. In plan and mechanism the story was one of a common romantic type, neither better nor worse than hundreds of others of which the literary archives of the first half of the present century are full. It required all the aid that fine literary treatment could give it to raise it above the level of vulgar melodrama and turn it into tragedy. But fortune had been kind to it; the subject had been already handled in the Italian sketch with delicacy and a true tragic insight, and Edward Wallace had brought all the resources of a very evenly-trained and critical

mind to bear upon his task. It could hardly have been foreseen that he would be attracted by the subject, but once at work upon it he had worked with enthusiasm.

The curtain drew up on the great hall of the Villena Palace. Everything that antiquarian knowledge could do had been brought to bear upon the surroundings of the scene; the delicate tilework of the walls and floor, the leather hangings, the tapestries, the carved wood and brass work of a Spanish palace of the fifteenth century, had been copied with lavish magnificence; and the crowded expectant house divided its attention and applause during the first scene between the beauty and elaboration of its setting and the play of the two tolerable actors who represented Elvira's father and the rival of Macias, Fernan Perez.

Fernan Perez, having set the intrigue on foot which is to wreck the love of Macias and Elvira, had just risen from his seat, when Wallace, who was watching the stage in a torment of mingled satisfaction and despair, touched Madame de Châteauvieux's arm.

'*Now!*' he said. 'That door to the left.'

Kendal, catching the signal, rose from his seat behind Madame de Châteauvieux and bent forward. The great door at the end of the palace had slowly opened, and gliding through it with drooping head and hands clasped before her came Elvira, followed by her little maid Beatrix. The storm which greeted her appearance was such as thrilled the pulses of the oldest *habitué* in the theatre. Tears came to Madame de Châteauvieux's eyes, and she looked up at her brother.

'What a scene! It is overpowering—it is too much for her! I wish they would let her go on!'

Kendal made no answer, his soul was in his eyes; he had no senses for any but one person. *She* was there, within a few yards of him, in all the sovereignty of her beauty and her fame, invested with the utmost romance that circumstances could bestow, and about, if half he heard were true, to reap a great artistic, no less than a great personal triumph. Had he felt towards her only as the public felt it would have been an experience beyond the common run, and as it

was—oh, this aching, intolerable sense of desire, of separation, of irremediable need! Was that her voice? He had heard that tone of despair in it before—under over-arching woods, when the June warmth was in the air! That white outstretched hand had once lain close clasped in his own; those eyes had once looked with a passionate trouble into his. Ah, it was gone for ever, nothing would ever recall it—that one quick moment of living contact! In a deeper sense than met the ear, she was on the stage and he among the audience. To the end his gray life would play the part of spectator to hers, or else she would soon have passed beyond his grasp and touch, just as Elvira would have vanished in a little while from the sight of the great audience which now hung upon her every movement.

Then from the consciousness of his own private smart he was swept out, whether he would or no, into the general current of feeling which was stirring the multitude of human beings around him, and he found himself gradually mastered by considerations of a different order altogether. Was this the actress he had watched with such inces-

sant critical revolt six months before? Was this the half-educated girl, grasping at results utterly beyond her realisation, whom he remembered?

It seemed to him impossible that this quick artistic intelligence, this nervous understanding of the demands made upon her, this faculty in meeting them, could have been developed by the same Isabel Bretherton whose earlier image was so distinctly graven on his memory. And yet his trained eye learned after a while to decipher in a hundred indications the past history of the change. He saw how she had worked, and where; the influences which had been brought to bear upon her were all familiar to him; they had been part of his own training, and they belonged, as he knew, to the first school of dramatic art in Europe—to the school which keeps alive from generation to generation the excellence and fame of the best French drama. He came to estimate by degrees all that she had done; he saw also all she had still to do. In the spring she had been an actress without a future, condemned by the inexorable logic of things to see her fame desert her with the first withering of her beauty. Now

she had, as it were, but started towards her rightful goal, but her feet were in the great high-road, and Kendal saw before her, if she had but strength to reach it, the very highest summit of artistic success.

The end of the first act was reached; Elvira, returning from the performance of the marriage ceremony in the chapel of the palace, had emerged hand-in-hand with her husband, and, followed by her wedding train, upon the great hall. She had caught sight of Macias standing blanched and tottering under the weight of the incredible news which had just been given to him by the Duke. She had flung away the hateful hand which held her, and, with a cry, instinct with the sharp and terrible despair of youth, she had thrown herself at the feet of her lover.

When the curtain fell, Edward Wallace could have had few doubts—if he had ever cherished any—of the success of his play. He himself escaped behind the scenes as soon as Miss Bretherton's last recall was over, and the box was filled in his absence with a stream of friends, and a constant murmur of congratu-

lation, which was music in the ears of Madame de Châteauvieux, and, for the moment, silenced in Kendal his own throbbing and desolate consciousness.

'There never was a holiday turned to such good account before,' a gray-haired dramatic critic was saying to her, a man with whose keen, good-natured face London had been familiar for the last twenty years. 'What magic has touched the beauty, Madame de Châteauvieux? Last spring we all felt as though one fairy godmother at least had been left out at the christening. And now it would seem as though even she had repented of it, and brought her gift with the rest. Well, well, I always felt there was something at the bottom in that nature that might blossom yet. Most people who are younger at the trade than I would not hear of it. It was commonly agreed that her success would last just as long as the first freshness of her beauty, and no more. And *now*—the English stage has laid its hold at last upon a great actress.'

Madame de Châteauvieux's smiling reply was broken by the reappearance of Wallace, round

whom the buzz of congratulation closed with fresh vigour.

'How is she?' asked Madame de Châteauvieux, laying a hand on his arm. 'Tired?'

'Not the least! But, of course, all the strain is to come. It is amazing, you know, this reception. It's almost more trying than the acting. Forbes in the wings, looking on, is a play in himself!'

In another minute the hubbub had swept out again, and the house had settled into silence.

Macias was the central figure of the second act. In the great scene of explanation between himself and Elvira, after he had forced his way into her apartment, his fury of jealous sarcasm, broken by flashes of the old absolute trust, of the old tender worship, had been finely conceived, and was well rendered by the promising young actor, whom Wallace had himself chosen for the part. Elvira, overwhelmed by the scorn and despair of her lover, and, conscious of the treachery which has separated them, is yet full of a blind resolve to play the part she has assumed to the bitter end, to save her own name

and her father's from dishonour, and to interpose the irrevocable barrier of her marriage vow between herself and Macias. Suddenly they are interrupted by the approach of the Duke and of Fernan Perez. Elvira throws herself between her husband and her lover, and, having captured the sword of Macias, hands it to the Duke. Macias is arrested after a tumultuous scene, and is led away, shaking off Elvira's efforts to save him with bitter contempt, and breaking loose from her with the prophecy that in every joy of the future and every incident of her wedded life, the spectre of his murdered love will rise before her, and 'every echo and every breeze repeat the fatal name, Macias.'

During the rapid give and take of this trying scene Kendal saw with a kind of incredulous admiration that Isabel Bretherton never once lost herself, that every gesture was true, every word struck home. Her extraordinary grace, her marvellous beauty were all subordinated to, forgotten almost in the supreme human passion speaking through her. Macias, in the height of his despair while he was still alone with her, had

flung her his sword, declaring that he would go forth and seek his death an unarmed and defenceless man. Then, when he becomes conscious of the approach of his rival, the soldier's instinct revives in him; he calls for his sword; she refuses it, and he makes a threatening step towards her.

'*Mac.* My sword, Elvira.

Elvira. Never!

Beatrix. Ah! they are here. It is too late!

Elvira. Go! No blood shall flow for me. Come no nearer—or I sheathe it in this breast.'

All the desperate energy of a loving woman driven to bay was in her attitude as she repelled Macias, whereas in the agony of her last clinging appeal to him, as his guards lead him off, every trace of her momentary heroism had died away. Faint and trembling, recoiling from every harsh word of his as from a blow, she had followed him towards the door, and in her straining eyes and seeking, outstretched hands as she watched him disappear, there was a pathos so true, so poignant, that it laid a spell upon the audience, and the curtain fell amid a breathless silence, which made

the roar that almost instantly followed doubly noticeable.

But it was in the third act that she won her highest triumph. The act opened with a scene between Elvira and her husband, in which she implored him, with the humility and hopelessness of grief, to allow her to retire from the world and to hide the beauty which had wrought such ruin from the light of day. He, in whom jealousy has taken fierce root, refuses with reproach and insult, and in the full tide of her passionate reaction against his tyranny, the news is brought her by Beatriz that Fernan, in his determination to avoid the duel with Macias on the morrow, which the Duke, in accordance with knightly usage, has been forced to grant, has devised means for assassinating his rival in prison. Naturally, her whole soul is thrown into an effort to save her lover. She bribes his guards. She sends Beatriz to denounce the treachery of her husband to the Duke, and, finally, she herself penetrates into the cell of Macias, to warn him of the fate that threatens him and to persuade him to fly.

It was, indeed, a dramatic moment when the

gloom of Macias's cell was first broken by the glimmer of the hand-lamp, which revealed to the vast expectant audience the form of Elvira standing on the threshold, searching the darkness with her shaded eyes; and in the great love scene which followed the first sharp impression was steadily deepened word by word and gesture after gesture by the genius of the actress. Elvira finds Macias in a mood of calm and even joyful waiting for the morrow. His honour is satisfied; death and battle are before him, and the proud Castilian is almost at peace. The vision of Elvira's pale beauty and his quick intuition of the dangers she has run in forcing her way to him produce a sudden revulsion of feeling towards her, a flood of passionate reconciliation; he is at her feet once more; he feels that she is true, that she is his. She, in a frenzy of fear, cannot succeed for all her efforts in dimming his ecstasy of joy or in awakening him to the necessity of flight, and at last he even resents her terror for him, her entreaties that he will forget her and escape.

'Great heaven!' he says, turning from her in

despair, 'it was not love, it was only pity that brought her here.' Then, broken down by the awful pressure of the situation, her love resists his no longer, but rather she sees in the full expression of her own heart the only chance of reconciling him to life, and of persuading him to take thought for his own safety.

'*Elvira.* See, Macias! these tears—each one is yours, is wept for you! Oh, if to soften that proud will of yours this hapless woman must needs open all her weak heart to you, if she must needs tell you that she lives only in your life and dies in your death, her lip will brace itself even to that pitiful confession! Ah me! these poor cheeks have been so blanched with weeping, they have no blushes left.'

To her this supreme avowal is the only means of making him believe her report of his danger, and turn towards flight; but in him it produces a joy which banishes all thought of personal risk, and makes separation from her worse than death. When she bids him fly, he replies by one word, 'Come!' and not till she has promised to guide him to the city gates and to follow him later on his journey will he move a step towards freedom. And then, when her dear hand is about to open

to him the door of his prison, it is too late. Fernan and his assassins are at hand, the stairs are surrounded, and escape is cut off. Again, in these last moments, when the locked door still holds between them and the death awaiting them, her mood is one of agonised terror, not for herself, but for him; while he, exalted far above all fear, supports and calms her.

'*Macias.* Think no more of the world which has destroyed us! We owe it nothing—nothing! Come, the bonds which linked us to it are for ever broken! Death is at the door; *we are already dead!* Come, and make death beautiful: tell me you love, love, love me to the end!'

Then, putting her from him, he goes out to meet his enemies. There is a clamour outside, and he returns wounded to death, pursued by Fernan and his men. He falls, and Elvira defends him from her husband with a look and gesture so terrible that he and the murderers fall back before her as though she were some ghastly avenging spirit. Then, bending over him, she snatches the dagger from the grasp of the dying man, saying to him, with a voice into which Isabel Bretherton threw a wealth of pitiful

tenderness, 'There is but one way left, beloved. Your wife that should have been, that is, saves herself and you—*so!*'

And in the dead silence that followed, her last murmur rose upon the air as the armed men, carrying torches, crowded round her. 'See, Macina, the torches—how they shine! *Bring more—bring more—and light—our marriage festival!*'

'Eustace! Eustace! there, now they have let her go! Poor child, poor child! how is she to stand this night after night? Eustace, do you hear? Let us go into her now—quick, before she is quite surrounded. I don't want to stay, but I must just see her, and so must Paul. Ah, Mr. Wallace is gone already, but he described to me how to find her. This way!'

And Madame de Châteauvieux, brushing the tears from her eyes with one hand, took Kendal's arm with the other, and hurried him along the narrow passages leading to the door on to the

stage, M. de Châteauvieux following them, his keen French face glistening with a quiet but intense satisfaction.

As for Kendal, every sense in him was covetously striving to hold and fix the experiences of the last half-hour. The white muffled figure standing in the turret door, the faint lamp light streaming on the bent head and upraised arm —those tones of self-forgetful passion, drawn straight, as it were, from the pure heart of love —the splendid energy of that last defiance of fate and circumstance—the low vibrations of her dying words—the power of the actress and the personality of the woman,—all these different impressions were holding wild war within him as he hastened on, with Marie clinging to his arm. And beyond the little stage-door the air seemed to be even more heavily charged with excitement than that of the theatre. For, as Kendal emerged with his sister, his attention was perforce attracted by the little crowd of persons already assembled round the figure of Isabel Bretherton, and, as his eye travelled over them, he realised with a fresh start the full compass of

the change which had taken place. To all the more eminent persons in that group Miss Bretherton had been six months before an ignorant and provincial beauty, good enough to create a social craze, and nothing more. Their presence round her at this moment, their homage, the emotion visible everywhere, proved that all was different, that she had passed the barrier which once existed between her and the world which knows and thinks, and had been drawn within that circle of individualities which, however undefined, is still the vital circle of any time or society, for it is the circle which represents, more or less brilliantly and efficiently, the intellectual life of a generation.

Only one thing was unchanged—the sweetness and spontaneity of that rich womanly nature. She gave a little cry as she saw Madame de Châteauvieux enter. She came running forward, and threw her arms round the elder woman and kissed her; it was almost the greeting of a daughter to a mother. And then, still holding Madame de Châteauvieux with one hand, she held out the other to Paul, asking him how much

fault he had to find, and when she was to take her scolding; and every gesture had a glow of youth and joy in it, of which the contagion was irresistible. She had thrown off the white head-dress she had worn during the last act, and her delicately-tinted head and neck rose from the splendid wedding-gown of gold-embroidered satin—a vision of flowerlike and aërial beauty.

Fast as the talk flowed about her, Kendal noticed that every one seemed to be, first of all, conscious of her neighbourhood, of her dress rustling past, of her voice in all its different shades of gaiety or quick emotion.

'Oh, Mr. Kendal,' she said, turning to him again after their first greeting—was it the magnetism of his gaze which had recalled hers?—'if you only knew what your sister has been to me! How much I owe to her and to you! It was kind of you to come to-night. I should have been so disappointed if you hadn't!'

Then she came closer to him, and said archly, almost in his ear,

'Have you forgiven me?'

'Forgiven you? For what?'

'For laying hands on Elvira, after all. You must have thought me a rash and headstrong person when you heard of it. Oh, I worked so hard at her, and all with the dread of you in my mind!'

This perfect friendly openness, this bright *camaraderie* of hers, were so hard to meet!

'You have played Elvira,' he said, 'as I never thought it would be played by anybody; and I was blind from first to last. I hoped you had forgotten that piece of pedantry on my part.'

'One does not forget the turning-points of one's life,' she answered with a sudden gravity.

Kendal had been keeping an iron grip upon himself during the past hours, but, as she said this, standing close beside him, it seemed to him impossible that his self-restraint should hold much longer. Those wonderful eyes of hers were full upon him; there was emotion in them,—evidently the Nuneham scene was in her mind, as it was in his,—and a great friendliness, even gratitude, seemed to look out through them. But it was as though his doom were written in

the very candour and openness of her gaze, and he rushed desperately into speech again, hardly knowing what he was saying.

'It gives me half pain, half pleasure, that you should speak of it so. I have never ceased to hate myself for that day. But you have travelled far indeed since the *White Lady*—I never knew any one do so much in so short a time!'

She smiled—did her lip quiver? Evidently his praise was very pleasant to her, and there must have been something strange and stirring to her feeling in the intensity and intimacy of his tone. Her bright look caught his again, and he believed for one wild moment that the eyelids sank and fluttered. He lost all consciousness of the crowd; his whole soul seemed concentrated on that one instant. Surely she must feel it, or love is indeed impotent!

But no,—it was all a delusion! she moved away from him, and the estranging present rushed in again between them.

'It has been M. de Châteauvieux's doing, almost all of it,' she said eagerly, with a change of voice, 'and your sister's. Will you come and

see me some time and talk about some of the Paris people? Oh, I am wanted! But first you must be introduced to Macias. Wasn't he good? It was such an excellent choice of Mr. Wallace's. There he is, and there is his wife, that pretty little dark woman.'

Kendal followed her mechanically, and presently found himself talking nothings to Mr. Harting, who, gorgeous in his Spanish dress, was receiving the congratulations which poured in upon him with a pleasant mixture of good manners and natural elation. A little farther on he stumbled upon Forbes and the Stuarts, Mrs. Stuart as sparkling and fresh as ever, a suggestive contrast in her American crispness and prettiness to the high-bred distinction of Madame de Châteauvieux, who was standing near her.

'Well, my dear fellow,' said Forbes, catching hold of him, 'how is that critical demon of yours? Is he scotched yet?'

'He is almost at his last gasp,' said Kendal, with a ghostly smile, and a reckless impulse to talk which seemed to him his salvation. 'He was never as vicious a creature as you thought

him, and Miss Bretherton has had no difficulty in slaying him. But that hall was a masterpiece, Forbes! How have your pictures got on with all this?'

'I haven't touched a brush since I came back from Switzerland, except to make sketches for this thing. Oh, it's been a terrible business! Mr. Worrall's hair has turned gray over the expenses of it; however, she and I would have our way, and it's all right—the play will run for twelve months, if she chooses, easily.'

Near by were the Worralls, looking a little sulky, as Kendal fancied, in the midst of this great inrush of the London world, which was sweeping their niece from them into a position of superiority and independence they were not at all prepared to see her take up. Nothing, indeed, could be prettier than her manner to them whenever she came across them, but it was evident that she was no longer an automaton to be moved at their will and pleasure, but a woman and an artist, mistress of herself and of her fate. Kendal fell into conversation on the subject with Mrs. Stuart, who was as communicative and amus-

ing as usual, and who chattered away to him till he suddenly saw Miss Bretherton signalling to him with her arm in that of his sister.

'Do you know, Mr. Kendal,' she said as he went up to her, 'you must really take Madame de Châteauvieux away out of this noise and crowd? It is all very well for her to preach to me. Take her to your rooms and get her some food. How I wish I could entertain you here; but with this crowd it is impossible.'

'Isabel, my dear Isabel,' cried Madame de Châteauvieux, holding her, 'can't you slip away too, and leave Mr. Wallace to do the honours? There will be nothing left of you to-morrow.'

'Yes, directly, directly! only I feel as if sleep were a thing that did not exist for me. But you must certainly go. Take her, Mr. Kendal; doesn't she look a wreck? I will tell M. de Châteauvieux and send him after you.'

She took Marie's shawl from Kendal's arm and put it tenderly round her; then she smiled down into her eyes, said a low 'good-night, best and kindest of friends!' and the brother and sister hurried away, Kendal dropping the hand

which had been cordially stretched out to himself.

'Do you mind, Eustace?' said Madame de Châteauvieux, as they walked across the stage. 'I ought to go, and the party ought to break up. But it is a shame to carry you off from so many friends.'

'Mind? Why, I have ordered supper for you in my rooms, and it is just midnight. I hope these people will have the sense to go soon. Now then, for a cab.'

They alighted at the gate of the Temple, and, as they walked across the quadrangle under a sky still heavy with storm-clouds, Madame de Châteauvieux said to her brother with a sigh: 'Well, it has been a great event. I never remember anything more exciting, or more successful. But there is one thing, I think, that would make me happier than a hundred Elviras, and that is to see Isabel Bretherton the wife of a man she loved!' Then a smile broke over her face as she looked at her brother.

'Do you know, Eustace, I quite made up my mind from those first letters of yours in May, in

spite of your denials, that you were very deeply taken with her? I remember quite seriously discussing the pros and cons of it with myself.'

The words were said so lightly, they betrayed so clearly the speaker's conviction that she had made a foolish mistake, that they stung Kendal to the quick. How could Marie have known? Had not his letters for the last three months been misleading enough to deceive the sharpest eyes? And yet he felt unreasonably that she ought to have known—there was a blind clamour in him against the bluntness of her sisterly perception.

His silence was so prolonged that Madame de Châteauvieux was startled by it. She slipped her hand into his arm. 'Eustace!' Still no answer. 'Have I said anything to annoy you—Eustace? Won't you let your old sister have her dreams?'

But still it seemed impossible for him to speak. He could only lay his hand over hers with a brotherly clasp. By this time they were at the foot of the stairs, and he led the way up, Madame de Châteauvieux following in a tumult of anxious

conjecture. When they reached his rooms he put her carefully into a chair by the fire, made her take some sandwiches, and set the kettle to boil in his handy bachelor way, that he might make her some tea, and all the time he talked about various nothings, till at last Marie, unable to put up with it any longer, caught his hand as he was bending over the fire.

'Eustace,' she exclaimed, 'be kind to me, and don't perplex me like this.—Oh, my poor old boy, are you in love with Isabel Bretherton?'

He drew himself to his full height on the rug, and gazed steadily into the fire, the lines of his mobile face settling into repose.

'Yes,' he said, as though to himself; 'I love her. I believe I have loved her from the first moment.'

Madame de Châteauvieux was tremblingly silent, her thoughts travelling back over the past with lightning rapidity. Could she remember one word, one look of Isabel Bretherton's, of which her memory might serve to throw the smallest ray of light on this darkness in which Eustace seemed to be standing? No, not one. Gratitude,

friendship, esteem—all these had been there abundantly, but nothing else, not one of those many signs by which one woman betrays her love to another! She rose and put her arm round her brother's neck. They had been so much to one another for nearly forty years; he had never wanted anything as a child or youth that she had not tried to get for him. How strange, how intolerable, that this toy, this boon, was beyond her getting!

Her mute sympathy and her deep distress touched him, while, at the same time, they seemed to quench the last spark of hope in him. Had he counted upon hearing something from her whenever he should break silence which would lighten the veil over the future? It must have been so, otherwise why this sense of fresh disaster?

'Dear Marie,' he said to her, kissing her brow as she stood beside him, 'you must be as good to me as you can. I shall probably be a good deal out of London for the present, and my books are a wonderful help. After all, life is not all summed up in one desire, however strong.

Other things are real to me—I am thankful to say. I shall live it down.'

'But why despair so soon?' she cried, rebelling against this heavy acquiescence of his and her own sense of hopelessness. 'You are a man any woman might love. Why should she not pass from the mere friendly intellectual relation to another? Don't go away from London. Stay and see as much of her as you can.'

Kendal shook his head. 'I used to dream,' he said huskily, 'of a time when failure should have come, when she would want some one to step in and shield her. Sometimes I thought of her protected in my arms against the world. But now!'

She felt the truth of his unspoken argument—of all that his tone implied. In the minds of both the same image gathered shape and distinctness. Isabel Bretherton in the halo of her great success, in all the intensity of her new life, seemed to her and to him to stand afar off, divided by an impassable gulf from this simple, human craving, which was crying to her, unheard and hopeless, across the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MONTH after the first performance of *Elvira* Kendal returned to town on a frosty December afternoon from the Surrey lodgings on which he had now established a permanent hold. He mounted to his room, found his letters lying ready for him, and on the top of them a telegram, which, as his man-servant informed him, had arrived about an hour before. He took it up carelessly, opened it, and bent over it with a start of anxiety. It was from his brother-in-law. '*Marie is very ill. Doctors much alarmed. Can you come to-night?*' He put it down in stupefaction. Marie ill! the doctors alarmed! Good heavens! could he catch that evening train? He looked at his watch, decided that there was time, and plunged, with his servant's help, into all the necessary preparations. An hour and a half later he was speeding along through the clear

cold moonlight to Dover, realising for the first time, as he leant back alone in his compartment, the full meaning of the news which had hurried him off. All his tender affection for his sister, and all his stifling sense of something unlucky and untoward in his own life, which had been so strong in him during the past two months, combined to rouse in him the blackest fears, the most hopeless despondency. Marie dead,—what would the world hold for him! Books, thought, ideas—were they enough? Could a man live by them if all else were gone? For the first time Kendal felt a doubt which seemed to shake his nature to its depths.

During the journey his thoughts dwelt in a dull sore way upon the past. He saw Marie in her childhood, in her youth, in her rich maturity. He remembered her in the schoolroom spending all her spare time over contrivances of one kind or another for his amusement. He had a vision of her going out with their mother on the night of her first ball, and pitying him for being left behind. He saw her tender face bending over the death-bed of their father, and through a hun-

dred incidents and memories—all beautiful, all intertwined with that lovely self-forgetfulness which was characteristic of her, his mind travelled down to an evening scarcely a month before, when her affection had once more stood, a frail warm barrier, between him and the full bitterness of a great renunciation. Oh Marie, Marie!

It was still dark when he reached Paris, and the gray winter light was only just dawning when he stopped at the door of his brother-in-law's house in one of the new streets near the Champs Elysées. M. de Châteauvieux was standing on the stairs, his smoothly-shaven, clear-cut face drawn and haggard, and a stoop in his broad shoulders which Kendal had never noticed before. Kendal sprang up the steps and wrung his hand. M. de Châteauvieux shook his head almost with a groan, in answer to the brother's inquiry of eye and lip, and led the way upstairs into the forsaken *salon*, which looked as empty and comfortless as though its mistress had been gone from it years instead of days. Arrived there, the two men standing opposite to each other in the streak of dull light made by the hasty withdrawal of a

curtain, Paul said, speaking in a whisper, with dry lips:

'There is no hope—the pain is gone; you would think she was better, but the doctors say she will just lie there as she is lying now till—till—the end.'

Kendal staggered over to a chair and tried to realise what he had heard, but it was impossible, although his journey had seemed to him one long preparation for the worst. 'What is it—how did it happen?' he asked.

'Internal chill. She was only taken ill the day before yesterday, and the pain was frightful till yesterday afternoon; then it subsided, and I thought she was better—she herself was so cheerful and so thankful for the relief—but when the two doctors came in again, it was to tell me that the disappearance of the pain meant only the worst—meant that nothing more can be done—she may go at any moment.'

There was a silence. M. de Châteauvieux walked up and down with the noiseless step which even a few hours of sickness develop in the watcher, till he came and stood before his

brother-in-law, saying in the same painful whisper, 'You must have some food, then I will tell her you are here.'

'No, no; I want no food,—any time will do for that. Does she expect me?'

'Yes; you won't wait? Then come.' He led the way across a little anteroom, lifted a curtain, and knocked. The nurse came, there was a little parley, and Paul went in, while Eustace waited outside, conscious of the most strangely trivial things, of the passers-by in the street, of a wrangle between two *gamins* on the pavement opposite, of the misplacement of certain volumes in the bookcase beside him, till the door opened again, and M. de Châteauvieux drew him in.

He stepped over the threshold, his whole being wrought up to he knew not what solemn pageant of death and parting, and the reality within startled him. The room was flooded with morning light, a frosty December sun was struggling through the fog, the curtains had just been drawn back, and the wintry radiance rested on the polished brass of the bed, on the bright surfaces of wood and glass with which the room was full,

on the little tray of tea-things which the nurse held, and on his sister's face of greeting as she lay back smiling among her pillows. There was such a cheerful home peace and brightness in the whole scene—in the crackling wood fire, in the sparkle of the tea-things and the fragrance of the tea, and in the fresh white surroundings of the invalid; it seemed to him incredible that under all this familiar household detail there should be lying in wait that last awful experience of death.

Marie kissed him with grateful affectionate words spoken almost in her usual voice, and then, as he sat beside her holding her hands, she noticed that he looked pale and haggard.

'Has he had some breakfast, Paul? Oh, poor Eustace, after that long journey! Nurse, let him have my cup, there is some tea left; let me see you drink it, dear; it's so pleasant just to look after you once more.'

He drank it mechanically, she watching him with her loving eyes, while she took one hand from him and slipped it into that of her husband as he sat beside her on the bed. Her

touch seemed to have meaning in it, for Paul rose presently and went to the far end of the large room; the nurse carried away the tea-things, and the brother and sister were practically alone.

'Dear Eustace,' she began, after a few pathetic moments of silence, in which look and gesture took the place of speech, 'I have so longed to see you. It seemed to me in that awful pain that I must die before I could gather my thoughts together once more, before I could get free enough from my own wretched self to say to my two dear ones all I wished to say. But now it is all gone, and I am so thankful for this moment of peace. I made Dr. de Chavannes tell me the whole truth. Paul and I have always promised one another that there should never be any concealment between us when either of us came to die, and I think I shall have a few hours more with you.'

She was silent a little; the voice had all its usual intonations, but it was low and weak, and it was necessary for her from time to time to gather such strength as might enable her to maintain the calm of her manner. Eustace, in

bewildered misery, had hidden his face upon her hands, which were clasped in his, and every now and then she felt the pressure of his lips upon her fingers.

'There are many things I want to say to you,' she went on. 'I will try to remember them in order. Will you stay with Paul a few days—after——? will you always remember to be good to him? I know you will. My poor Paul, oh if I had but given you a child!'

The passion of her low cry thrilled Eustace's heart. He looked up and saw on her face the expression of the hidden yearning of a lifetime. It struck him as something awful and sacred; he could not answer it except by look and touch, and presently she went on after another pause:

'His sister will come to him very likely—his widowed sister. She has a girl he is fond of. After a while he will take pleasure in her.—Then I have thought so much of you and of the future. So often last night I thought I saw you and *her*, and what you ought to do seemed to grow plain to me. Dear Eustace, don't let anything I say now ever be a burden to you—don't let it fetter

you ever—but it is so strong in me you must let me say it all. She is not in love with you, Eustace—at least, I think not. She has never thought of you in that way; but there is everything there which ought to lead to love. You interest her deeply; the thought of you stands to her as the symbol of all she wants to reach; and then she knows what you have been to all those who trusted you. She knows that you are good and true. I want you to try and carry it farther for her sake and yours.' He looked up and would have spoken, but she put her soft hand over his mouth. 'Wait one moment. Those about her are not people to make her happy—at any time if things went wrong—if she broke down—she would be at their mercy. Then her position—you know what difficulties it has—it makes my heart ache sometimes to think of it. She won my love so. I felt like a mother to her. I long to have her here now, but I would not let Paul send; and if I could think of her safe with you—in those true hands of yours. Oh, you will try, darling?' He answered her huskily and brokenly, laying his face to hers on the pillow.

'I would do anything you asked. But she is so likely to love and marry. Probably there is some one—already. How could it not be with her beauty and her fame? Anybody would be proud to marry her, and she has such a quick eager nature.

'There is no one!' said Marie, with deep conviction in the whispered words. 'Her life has been too exciting—too full of one interest. She stayed with me; I got to know her to the bottom. She would not have hidden it. Only say you will make one trial and I should be content.'

And then her innate respect for another's individuality, her shrinking from what might prove to be the tyranny of a dying wish interposed, and she checked herself. 'No, don't promise; I have no right—no one has any right. I can only tell you my feeling—my deep sense that there is hope—that there is nothing against you. Men—good men—are so often over-timid when courage would be best. Be bold, Eustace; respect your own love; do not be too proud to show it—to offer it!'

Her voice died away into silence, only Eustace

still felt the caressing touch of the thin fingers clasped round his. It seemed to him as if the life still left in her were one pure flame of love, undimmed by any thought of self, undisturbed by any breath of pain. Oh, this victory of the spirit over the flesh, of soul over body, which humanity achieves and renews from day to day and from age to age, in all those nobler and finer personalities upon whom the moral life of the world depends! How it burns its testimony into the heart of the spectator! How it makes him thrill with the apprehension which lies at the root of all religion—the apprehension of an ideal order—the divine suspicion

'That we are greater than we know!'

How it impresses itself upon us as the only miracle which will bear our leaning upon, and stand the strain of human questioning! It was borne in upon Eustace, as he sat bowed beside his dying sister, that through this fragile body and this failing breath the Eternal Mind was speaking, and that in Marie's love the Eternal Love was taking voice. He said so to her

brokenly, and her sweet eyes smiled back upon him a divine answer of peace and faith.

Then she called faintly, 'Paul!' The distant figure came back; and she laid her head upon her husband's breast, while Eustace was gently drawn away by the nurse. Presently, he found himself mechanically taking food and mechanically listening to the low-voiced talk of the kindly white-capped woman who was attending to him. Every fact, every impression, was misery,—these details so unexpected, so irrevocable, so charged with terrible meaning, which the nurse was pouring out upon him,—that presence in the neighbouring room of which his every nerve was conscious, —and in front of him, like a frowning barrier shutting off the view of the future, the advancing horror of death! Yesterday, at the same time, he had been walking along the sandy Surrey roads, delighting in the last autumn harmonies of colour, and conscious of the dawn of a period of rest after a period of conflict, of the growth within him of a temper of quiet and rational resignation to the conditions of life and of his own individual lot, over the development of which the years fast

of his sister's existence had exercised a strong and steadying influence. Life, he had persuaded himself, was for him more than tolerable, even without love and marriage. The world of thought was warm and hospitable to him; he moved at ease within its friendly familiar limits; and in the world of personal relations, one heart was safely his, the sympathy and trust and tenderness of one human soul would never fail him at his need. And now this last tender bond was to be broken with a rough, incredible suddenness. The woman he loved with passion would never be his; for not even now, fresh from contact with his sister's dying hope, could he raise himself to any flattering vision of the future; and the woman he loved, with that intimate tenacity of affection which is the poetry of kinship, was to be taken from him by this cruel wastefulness of premature death. Could any man be more alone than he would be? And then suddenly a consciousness fell upon him which made him ashamed. In the neighbouring room his ear was caught now and then by an almost imperceptible murmur of voices. What was his loss, his agony, compared to theirs?

When he softly returned into the room he found Marie lying as though asleep upon her husband's arm. It seemed to him that since he had left her there had been a change. The face was more drawn, the look of exhaustion more defined. Paul sat beside her, his eyes rivetted upon her. He scarcely seemed to notice his brother-in-law's entrance; it was as though he were rapidly losing consciousness of every fact but one; and never had Kendal seen any countenance so grief-stricken, so pinched with longing. But Marie heard the familiar step. She made a faint movement with her hand towards him, and he resumed his old place, his head bowed upon the bed. And so they sat through the morning, hardly moving, interchanging at long intervals a few words—those sad sacred words which well from the heart in the supreme moments of existence—words which, in the case of such natures as Marie de Châteauvieux, represent the intimate truths and fundamental ideas of the life that has gone before. There was nothing to hide, nothing to regret. A few kindly messages, a few womanly commissions, and every now and

then a few words to her husband, as simple as the rest, but pregnant with the deepest thoughts and touching the vastest problems of humanity,—this was all. Marie was dying as she had lived —bravely, tenderly, simply.

Presently they roused her to take some nourishment, which she swallowed with difficulty. It gave her a momentary strength. Kendal heard himself called, and looked up. She had opened the hand lying on the bed, and he saw in it a small miniature case, which she moved towards him.

'Take it,' she said—oh, how faintly!—'to her. It is the only memento I can think of. She has been ill, Eustace: did I tell you? I forget. I should have gone—but for this. It is too much for her,—that life. It will break her down. You can save her and cherish her—you will. It seems as if I saw you—together!'

Then her eyes fell and she seemed to sleep—gently wandering now and then, and mentioning in her dying dream names and places which made the reality before them more and more terrible to the two hushed listeners, so different were the

associations they called up. Was this white nerveless form, from which mind and breath were gently ebbing away, all that fate had grudgingly left to them, for a few more agonised moments, of the brilliant, high-bred woman who had been but yesterday the centre of an almost European network of friendships and interests! Love, loss, death,—oh, how unalterable is this essential content of life, embroider it and adorn it as we may!

Kendal had been startled by her words about Isabel Bretherton. He had not heard of any illness; it could hardly be serious, for he vaguely remembered that in the newspapers he had tried to read on the journey his eye had caught the familiar advertisement of the *Calliope*. It must have happened while he was in Surrey. He vaguely speculated about it now and then as he sat watching through the afternoon. But nothing seemed to matter very much to him—nothing but Marie and the slow on-coming of death.

At last when the wintry light was fading, when the lamps were being lit outside, and the bustle of the street seemed to penetrate in little

intermittent waves of sound into the deep quiet of the room, Marie raised herself and, with a fluttering sigh, withdrew her hand softly from her brother, and laid her arm round her husband's neck. He stooped to her — kissed the sweet lips and the face on which the lines of middle age had hardly settled — caught a wild alarm from her utter silence, called the nurse and Kendal, and all was over.

CHAPTER IX.

THE morning of Marie's funeral was sunny but bitterly cold; it was one of those days when autumn finally passes into winter, and the last memory of the summer warmth vanishes from the air. It had been the saddest, dreariest laying to rest. The widowed sister, of whom Marie had spoken in her last hours, had been unable to come, and the two men had gone through it all alone, helped only by the tearful, impulsive sympathy and the practical energy of the maid who had been with Marie ever since her marriage, and was as yet hardly capable of realising her mistress's death.

It was she who, while they were away, had done her best to throw a little air of comfort over the forsaken *salon*. She had kindled the fire, watered the plants, and thrown open the windows to the sunshine, finding in her toil and movement some little relief from her own heart-

ache and oppression. When Paul came back, and with numb, trembling fingers had stripped himself of his scarf and his great-coat, he stepped over the threshold into the *salon*, and it seemed to him as though the sunlight and the open windows and the crackling blaze of the fire dealt him a sudden blow. He walked up to the windows, and, shuddering, drew them down and closed the blinds, Félicie watching him anxiously from the landing through the half-open door. Then he had thrown himself into a chair; and Kendal, coming softly upstairs after him, had gently closed the door from the outside, said a kind word to Félicie, and himself slipped noiselessly down again and out into the Champs Elysées. There he had paced up and down for an hour or more under the trees, from which a few frosty leaves were still hanging in the December air.

He himself had been so stunned and bewildered by the loss which had fallen upon him, that, when he found himself alone and out of doors again, he was for a while scarcely able to think consecutively about it. He walked along conscious for some time of nothing but a sort of

dumb physical congeniality in the sunshine, in the clear blue and white of the sky, in the cheerful distinctness and sharpness of every outline. And then, little by little, the cheated grief reasserted itself, the numbed senses woke into painful life, and he fell into broken musings on the past, or into a bitter wonder over the precarious tenure by which men hold those good things whereon, so long as they are still their own, they are so quick to rear an edifice of optimist philosophy. A week before, his sister's affection had been to him the one sufficient screen between his own consciousness and the desolate threatening immensities of thought and of existence. The screen had fallen, and the darkness seemed to be rushing in upon him. And still, life had to be lived, work to be got through, duties to be faced. How is it done? he kept vaguely wondering. How is it that men live on to old age and see bond after bond broken, and possession after possession swept away, and still find the years tolerable and the sun pleasant, still cherish in themselves that inexhaustible faith in an ideal something which

supplies from century to century the invincible motive power of the race?

Presently—by virtue of long critical and philosophical habit—his mind brought itself to bear more and more steadily upon his own position; he stepped back, as it were, from himself and became his own spectator. The introspective temper was not common with him; his mind was naturally turned outward—towards other people, towards books, towards intellectual interests. But self-study had had its charm for him of late, and, amongst other things, it was now plain to him that up to the moment of his first meeting with Isabel Bretherton his life had been mostly that of an onlooker—a bystander. Society, old and new, men and women of the past and of the present, the speculative achievements of other times and of his own,—these had constituted a sort of vast drama before his eyes, which he had watched and studied with an ever-living curiosity. But his interest in his particular *rôle* had been comparatively weak, and in analysing other individualities he had run some risk of losing his own.

Then love came by, and the half-dormant personality within him had been seized upon and roused, little by little, into a glowing, although a repressed and hidden, energy. He had learnt in his own person what it means to crave, to thirst, to want. And now, grief had followed and had pinned him more closely than ever to his special little part in the human spectacle. The old loftiness, the old placidity of mood, were gone. He had loved, and lost, and despaired. Beside those great experiences how trivial and evanescent seemed all the interests of the life that went before them! He looked back over his intercourse with Isabel Bretherton, and the points upon which it had turned seemed so remote from him, so insignificant, that for the moment he could hardly realise them. The artistic and æsthetic questions which had seemed to him so vital six months before had faded almost out of view in the fierce neighbourhood of sorrow and passion. His first relation to her had been that of one who knows to one who is ignorant; but that puny link had dropped, and he was going to meet her now, fresh from the presence of death, loving her

as a man loves a woman, and claiming from her nothing but pity for his grief, balm for his wound, —the answer of human tenderness to human need.

How strange and sad that she should be still in ignorance of his loss and hers! In the early morning after Marie's death, when he woke up from a few heavy hours of sleep, his mind had been full of her. How was the news to be broken to her? He himself did not feel that he could leave his brother-in-law. There was a strong regard and sympathy between them; and his presence in the house of mourning would undoubtedly be useful to Paul for a while; besides, there were Marie's words—'Will you stay with him a few days—after——?'—which were binding on him. He must write, then; but it was only to be hoped that no newspaper would bring her the news before his letter could reach.

However, as the day wore on, Paul came noiselessly out of the quiet room where the white shrouded form seemed still to spread a tender presence round it, and said to Eustace with dry, piteous lips:

'I have remembered Miss Bretherton; you must go to her to-morrow, after—the funeral.'

'I can't bear the thought of leaving you,' said Kendal, laying a brotherly hand on his shoulder. 'Let me write to-day.'

Paul shook his head. 'She has been ill. Any way it will be a great shock; but if you go it will be better.'

Kendal resisted a little more, but it seemed as if Marie's motherly carefulness over the bright creature who had charmed her had passed into Paul. He was saying what Marie would have said, taking thought as she would have taken it for one she loved, and it was settled as he wished.

When his long pacing in the Champs Elysées was over Kendal went back to find Paul busy with his wife's letters and trinkets, turning them over with a look of shivering forlornness, as though the thought of the uncompanioned lifetime to come were already closing upon him like some deadly chill in the air. Beside him lay two miniature cases open; one of them was the case which Eustace had received from his sister's hand on the afternoon before her death, and both of

them contained identical portraits of Marie in her first brilliant womanhood.

'Do you remember them?' Paul said in his husky voice, pointing them out to him. 'They were done when you were at college and she was twenty-three. Your mother had two taken—one for herself and one for your old aunt Marion. Your mother left me hers when she died, and your aunt's copy of it came back to us last year. Tell Miss Bretherton its history. She will prize it. It is the best picture still.'

Kendal made a sign of assent and took the case. Paul rose and stood beside him, mechanically spreading out his hands to the fire.

'To-morrow, as soon as you are gone, I shall go off to Italy. There are some little places in the south near Naples that she was very fond of. I shall stay about there for a while. As soon as I feel I can, I shall come back to the Senate and my work. It is the only thing left me,—she was so keen about it.' His voice sank into a whisper, and a long silence fell upon them. Women in moments of sorrow have the outlet of tears and caresses; men's great refuge is silence;

but the silence may be charged with sympathy and the comfort of a shared grief. It was so in this case.

The afternoon light was fading, and Kendal was about to rise and make some necessary preparations for his journey, when Paul detained him, looking up at him with sunken eyes which seemed to carry in them all the history of the two nights just past. 'Will you ever ask her what Marie wished?' The tone was the even and passionless tone of one who for the moment feels none of the ordinary embarrassments of intercourse; Kendal met it with the same directness.

'Some day I shall ask her, or at least I shall let her know; but it will be no use.'

Paul shook his head, but whether in protest or agreement Kendal could hardly tell. Then he went back to his task of sorting the letters, and let the matter drop. It seemed as if he were scarcely capable of taking an interest in it for its own sake, but simply as a wish, a charge of Marie's.

Kendal parted from him in the evening with

an aching heart, and was haunted for hours by the memory of the desolate figure returning slowly into the empty house, and by a sharp prevision of all the lonely nights and the uncomforted morrows which lay before the stricken man.

But, as Paris receded farther and farther behind him, and the sea drew nearer, and the shores of the country which held Isabel Bretherton, it was but natural that even the grip upon him of this terrible and startling calamity should relax a little, and that he should realise himself as a man seeking the adored woman, his veins still beating with the currents of youth, and the great unguessed future still before him. He had left Marie in the grave, and his life would bear the scar of that loss for ever. But Isabel Bretherton was still among the living, the warm, the beautiful, and every mile brought him nearer to the electric joy of her presence. He took a sad strange pleasure in making the contrast between the one picture and the other as vivid as possible. Death and silence on the one side—oh, how true and how irreparable! But on the other, he forced on his imagination till it drew for him an

image of youth and beauty so glowing that it almost charmed the sting out of his grief. The English paper which he succeeded in getting at Calais contained the announcement: 'Miss Bretherton has, we are glad to say, completely recovered from the effects of the fainting fit which so much alarmed the audience at the *Calliope* last week. She was able to play *Elvira* as usual last night, and was greeted by a large and sympathetic house.' He read it, and turned the page hastily, as if what the paragraph suggested was wholly distasteful to him. He refused altogether to think of her as weak or suffering; he shrank from his own past misgivings, his own prophecies about her. The world would be a mere dark prison-house if her bright beauty were over-clouded! She was not made for death, and she should stand to him as the image of all that escapes and resists and defies that tyrant of our years, and pain, his instrument and herald.

He reached London in the midst of a rainy fog. The endless black streets stretched before him in the dreary December morning like so many roads into the nether regions; the gas-

lamps scattered an unseasonable light through the rain and fog; it was the quintessence of murky, cheerless winter.

He reached his own rooms, and found his man up and waiting for him, and a meal ready. It was but three days since he had been last there, the open telegram was still lying on the table. One of his first acts was to put it hastily out of sight. Over his breakfast he planned his embassy to Miss Bretherton. The best time to find her alone, he imagined, would be about mid-day, and in the interval he would put his books and papers to rights. They lay scattered about—books, proofs, and manuscript. As his orderly hands went to work upon them, he was conscious that he had never been so remote from all that they represented. But his nature was faithful and tenacious, and under the outward sense of detachment there was an inward promise of return. 'I will come back to you,' seemed to be the cry of his thought. 'You shall be my only friends. But first I must see her, and all my heart is hers!'

The morning dragged away, and at half-past

eleven he went out, carrying the little case with him. As he stood outside the Bayswater house, in which she had settled for the winter, he realised that he had never yet been under her roof, never yet seen her at home. It was his own fault. She had asked him in her gracious way, on the first night of *Elvira*, to come and see her. But, instead of doing so, he had buried himself in his Surrey lodging, striving to bring the sober and austere influences of the country to bear upon the feverish indecision of his mood. Perhaps his disappearance and silence had wounded her; after all, he knew that he had some place in her thoughts.

The servant who opened the door demurred to his request to see Miss Bretherton. 'The doctor says, sir, that at home she must keep quiet; she has not seen any visitors just lately.' But Kendal persisted, and his card was taken in, while he waited the result. The servant hurried along the ground-floor passage, knocked at the door at the farther end, went in for a moment, and came out beckoning to him. He obeyed with a beating heart, and she threw open the door for him.

Inside stood Isabel Bretherton, with eager surprise and pleasure in her whole attitude. She had just risen from her chair, and was coming forward; a soft white cashmere shawl hung around her; her dress, of some dark rich stuff, fell with the flowing, stately lines peculiar to it; her face was slightly flushed, and the brilliancy of her colour, of her hair, of her white, outstretched hand, seemed to Kendal to take all the chill and gloom out of the winter air. She held some proof sheets of a new play in her hand, and the rest lay piled beside her on a little table.

'How kind of you, Mr. Kendal,' she said, advancing with her quick impulsive step towards him. 'I thought you had forgotten us, and I have been wanting your advice so badly! I have just been complaining of you a little in a letter to Madame de Châteauvieux! She——'

Then she suddenly stopped, checked and startled by his face. He was always colourless and thin, but the two nights he had just passed through had given him an expression of haggard exhaustion. His black eyes seemed to have lost

the keenness which was so remarkable in them, and his prematurely gray hair gave him almost a look of age in spite of the lightness and pliancy of the figure.

He came forward, and took her hand nervously and closely in his own.

'I have come to bring you sad news,' he said gently, and seeking anxiously word by word how he might soften what, after all, could not be softened. 'M. de Châteauvieux sent me to you at once, that you should not hear in any other way. But it must be a shock to you—for you loved her!'

'Oh!' she cried, interrupting him, speaking in short, gasping words, and answering not so much his words as his look. 'She is ill—she is in danger—something has happened?'

'I was summoned on Wednesday,' said Kendal, helpless after all in the grip of the truth which would not be managed or controlled. 'When I got there she had been two days ill, and there was no hope.'

He paused; her eyes of agonised questioning implored him to go on. 'I was with her six

hours—after I came she had no pain—it was quite peaceful, and—she died in the evening.'

She had been watching him open-eyed, every vestige of colour fading from cheek and lip; when he stopped, she gave a little cry. He let go her hand, and she sank into a chair near, so white and breathless that he was alarmed.

'Shall I get you water—shall I ring?' he asked after a moment or two, bending over her.

'No,' she whispered with difficulty; 'let me alone—just for a minute.'

He left her side, and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, waiting anxiously. She struggled against the physical oppression which had seized upon her, and fought it down bravely. But he noticed with a pang now that the flush was gone, that she looked fragile and worn, and, as his thought went back for a moment to the Surrey Sunday and her young rounded beauty among the spring green, he could have cried out in useless rebellion against the unyielding physical conditions which press upon and imprison the flame of life.

At last the faintness passed off, and she sat up,

her hands clasped round her knees, and the tears running fast over her cheeks. Her grief was like herself—frank, simple, expressive.

'Will you tell me more about it? Oh, I cannot believe it! Why, only last week when I was ill she talked of coming to me! I have just been writing to her—there is my letter. I feel as if I could not bear it; she was like a mother to me in Paris. Oh, if I could have seen her!'

'You were one of her chief thoughts at the last,' said Kendal, much moved. And he went on to tell her the story of Marie's dying hours, describing that gentle withdrawal from life with a manly tenderness of feeling and a quick memory for all that could soften the impression of it to the listener. And then he brought out the miniature and gave it to her, and she accepted it with a fresh burst of sorrow, putting it to her lips, studying it and weeping over it, with an absolute spontaneity and self-abandonment which was lovely because it was so true.

'Oh, poor M. de Châteauvieux!' she cried after a long pause, looking up to him. 'How will he

live without her? He will feel himself so forsaken!'

'Yes,' said Kendal huskily; 'he will be very lonely, but—one must learn to bear it.'

She gazed at him with quick startled sympathy, and all her womanly nature seemed to rise into her upturned face and yearning eyes. It was as though her attention had been specially recalled to him; as though his particular loss and sorrow were brusquely brought home to her. And then she was struck by the strangeness and unexpectedness of such a meeting between them. He had been to her a judge, an authority, an embodied standard. His high-mindedness had won her confidence; his affection for his sister had touched and charmed her. But she had never been conscious of any intimacy with him. Still less had she ever dreamt of sharing a common grief with him, of weeping at his side. And the contrast between her old relation with him and this new solemn experience, rushing in upon her, filled her with emotion. The memory of the Nuneham day woke again in her—of the shock between her nature and his, of her overwhelming sense of the

intellectual difference between them, and then of the thrill which his verdict upon *Elvira* had stirred in her. The relation which she had regarded as a mere intellectual and friendly one, but which had been far more real and important to her than even she herself had ever guessed, seemed to have transformed itself since he had entered the room into something close and personal. His last words had called up in her a sharp impression of the man's inmost nature as it was, beneath the polished scholarly surface. They had appealed to her on the simplest, commonest, human ground; she felt them impulsively as a call from him to her, and her own heart overflowed.

She rose, and went near to him, bending towards him like a spirit of healing, her whole soul in her eyes. 'Oh, I am so sorry for you!' she exclaimed, and again the quick tears dropped. 'I know it is no common loss to you. You were so much more to each other than brother and sister often are. It is terrible for you.'

His whole man was stirred by her pity, by the eager expansiveness of her sympathy.

'Say it again!' he murmured, as their eyes met; 'say it again. It is so sweet—from you!'

There was a long pause; she stood as if fascinated, her hands falling slowly beside her. Her gaze wavered till the eyelids fell, and she stood absolutely motionless, the tears still on her cheek. The strange intoxicating force of feeling, set in motion by sorrow and pity, and the unsuspected influence of his love, was sweeping them out into deep waters. She could hardly breathe, but as he watched her all the manhood in him rose, and from the midst of grief put forward an imperious claim to the beloved and beautiful woman before him. He came forward a step, took the cold, unresisting hands, and, bending before her, pressed them to his lips, while her bewildered eyes looked down upon him.

'Your pity is heavenly,' he said brokenly; 'but give me more, give me more! I want your love!'

She gave a little start and cry, and, drawing away her hands from him, sank back on her chair. Her thoughts went flying back to the past—to the stretches of Surrey common, to the

Nuneham woods, and all she had ever seen or imagined of his feelings towards her. She had never, never suspected him of loving her. She had sent him her friendly messages from Venice in the simplest good faith; she had joined in his sister's praises of him without a moment's self-consciousness. His approval of her play in *Elvira* had given her the same frank pleasure that a master's good word gives to a pupil—and all the time he had loved her—loved her! How strange! how incredible!

Kendal followed, bent over her, listened, but no word came. She was, indeed, too bewildered and overwhelmed to speak. The old bitter fear and certainty began to assert itself against the overmastering impulse which had led him on.

'I have startled you—shocked you,' he cried. 'I ought not to have spoken—and at such a time. It was your pity overcame me—your sweet womanly kindness. I have loved you, I think, ever since that first evening after the *White Lady*. At least, when I look back upon my feeling, I see that it was love from the beginning. After that day at Nuneham I knew

that it was love; but I would not acknowledge it; I fought against it. It seemed to me that you would never forget that I had been harsh, that I had behaved rather like an enemy than a friend. But you did forget—you showed me how noble a woman could be, and every day after we parted in July I loved you more. I thought of you all the summer when I was buried in the country—my days and nights were full of you. Then when your great success came—it was base of me—but all the time while I was sending my congratulations to you through my sister at Venice, I was really feeling that there was no more hope for me, and that some cruel force was carrying you away from me. Then came *Elvira* —and I seemed to give you up for ever.'

Her hands dropped from her face, and her great hazel eyes were fixed upon him with that intent look he remembered long ago when she had asked him for the 'truth' about herself and her position. But there was no pain in it now; nothing but wonder and a sweet moved questioning.

'Why?' The word was just breathed through her parted lips.

Kendal heard it with a start—the little sound loosed his speech and made him eloquent.

'Why? Because I thought you must inevitably be absorbed, swallowed up by the great new future before you; because my own life looked so gray and dull beside yours. I felt it impossible you should stoop from your height to love me, to yield your bright self to me, to give me heart for heart. So I went away that I might not trouble you. And then'—his voice sank lower still—'came the summons to Paris, and Marie on her death-bed tried to make me hope. And just now your pity drew the heart out of my lips. Let me hear you forgive me.'

Every word had reached its mark. She had realised at last something of the depth, the tenacity, the rich, illimitable promise of the passion which she had roused. The tenderness of Marie seemed to encompass them, and a sacred pathetic sense of death and loss drew them together. Her respect, her reverence, her interest had been yielded long ago; did this troubled yearning within mean something more, something infinitely greater?

She raised herself suddenly, and, as he knelt

beside her, he felt her warm breath on his cheek, and a tear dropped on to his hands, which her own were blindly and timidly seeking.

'Oh!' she whispered, or rather sobbed, 'I never dreamt of it. I never thought of anything like this. But—do not leave me again. I could not bear it.'

Kendal bowed his head upon the hands nestling in his, and it seemed to him as if life and time were suspended, as if he and she were standing within the 'wind-warm space' of love, while death and sorrow and parting—three grave and tender angels of benediction—kept watch and ward without.

THE END.

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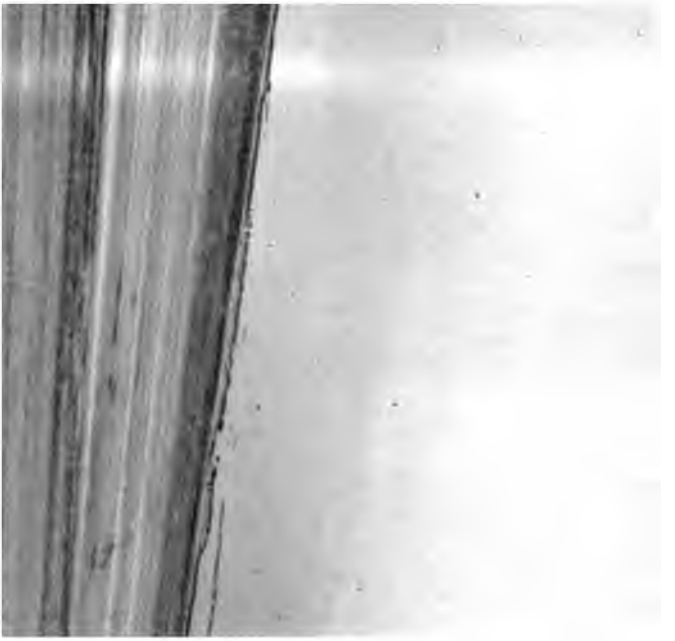

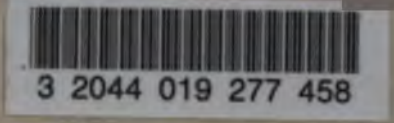

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